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# THE LURE OF THE RIVIERA

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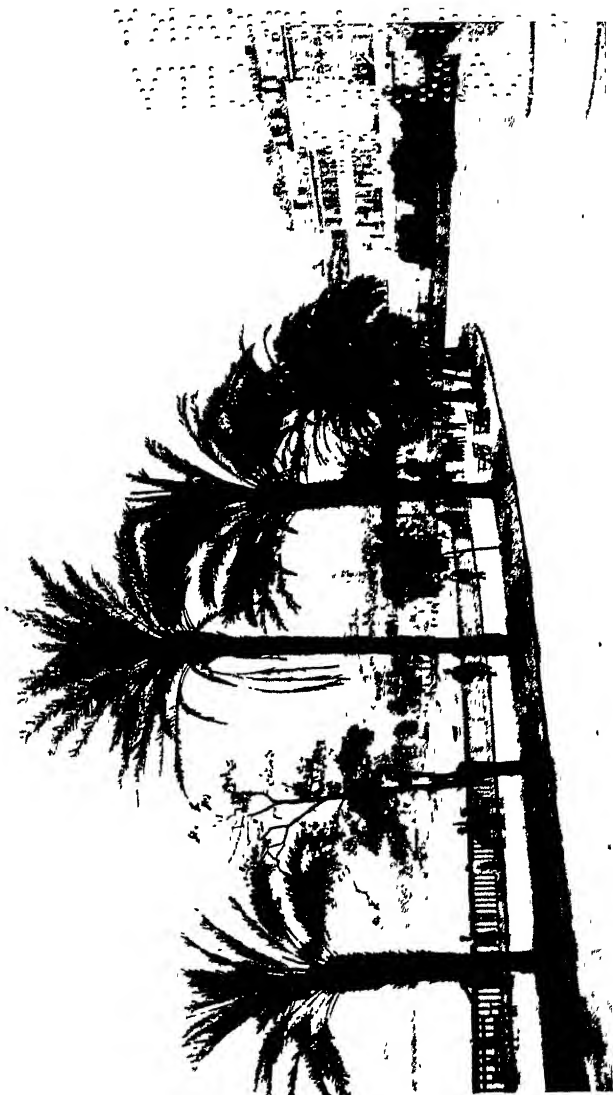
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NICE



# THE LURE OF THE RIVIERA

BY  
FRANCES M. GOSTLING

OFFICIER D'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE  
AUTHOR OF "THE LURE OF FRENCH CHATEAUX," ETC.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

MILLS & BOON, LIMITED  
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*Published 1923*

There eternal Summer dwells,  
And west winds with musky wing  
About the cedarn alleys fling  
Nard and Cassia's balmy smells.  
Iris there with humid bow  
Waters the odorous banks, that blow  
Flowers of more mingled hue  
Than her purpled scarf can shew.



## PREFACE

MOST people, who know the Riviera, picture it in winter or spring. I, on the contrary, shall speak of it in autumn, when the grapes are hanging in purple or green clusters, and the trees are laden with figs and chestnuts, and golden oranges begin to glow among the dark glossy leaves. It is thus I always dream of that southern land, and, in spite of the charms which clothe it in the better-known seasons, it is thus that I shall always love it best.

It is in autumn that you have the glory to yourself, and, if you are by nature an anchorite, as I am, solitude is essential to complete happiness. It takes a certain amount of space to enjoy oneself in the delirious fashion demanded by the Riviera, and in autumn there is plenty of space.

Then, too, everyone is so pleased to see you. The peasants (who always take us for a couple of wandering postcard photographers) have any amount of time to tell us about their lives, their families, their legends, the little stories which make each place so sweet and homelike.

And the Sunsets ! It is worth the whole

journey to Cannes to see the mountains of the Esterel, lying like black velvet against the flaming dahlia of the western sky, and the ghostly islands floating upon the sea of glass. In fact, the Riviera in autumn is the loveliest land on earth, and there is scarcely anyone there but oneself to see it.

So, in this little book I have jotted down a few of the impressions gathered from two autumnal rambles, hoping that some who, like myself, prefer to visit a country in its natural state, may be induced to follow my example, and spend an autumn holiday in the Riviera.

The book has no sequence. It consists of mere detached fragments; glimpses, caught in passing, of old walled towns and feudal fortresses, of gorges, and rivers, and ancient churches, of happy peasants, and forgotten saints, in fact of anything which struck my fancy, and which I thought might strike that of my readers.

So, with this word of introduction, I shall open the pages of the old notebook I always keep in my pocket and try to give you some idea of the autumn weeks we spent in the Riviera.

FRANCES M. GOSTLING.

BARNINGHAM,  
SLINDON.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE matter of this book appeared years ago in "Rambles About the Riviera," which has been out of print for some time. When the question of a re-issue was considered, it was thought desirable to present it in a more handy form. This book, therefore, deals with the Eastern portion of the Riviera. It has been carefully revised.



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## CHAPTER I

### I. NICE

At the corner of the Rue Biscarra is a tall white house, built, like most of the houses in Nice, of hollow bricks and stucco. If you enter the great street door, you will find yourself under a broad archway leading to a garden; while another door, to the right, conducts you to the staircase. Mounting upwards you come to a third portal, on which is a card intimating that the flat to which it gives entrance belongs to Mademoiselle Balbs.

It was, in fact, with Mademoiselle that we had arranged to install ourselves, and when we had taken a survey of our little domain, and packed our luggage away, we found we had, as usual, fallen on our feet. For there was all the difference in the world between a great cosmopolitan hotel, half shut up to boot, as is the case at Nice in autumn, and this cosy, home-like apartment. We had it all to ourselves, for Mademoiselle, who was Protestant and very devout, lived a busy life among her poor people, leaving us to the

(1)

care of her stout *bonne* Marie, who saw that we wanted for nothing. It was a delightful sunny place in the centre of the town. From our bedroom we looked down into the Rue Biscarra, a street of many restaurants, not the gorgeous palaces we usually associate with Nice, but homely places, where the Niçois of limited means took their evening meal. The menu, with its price, was fixed up at each door, and the blinds left undrawn that the passer-by might be attracted by the bright interior and little tables covered with their clean cloths. There was the Restaurant d'Espagne at 2 francs 50 centimes; the Français, the Fourmi, still cheaper; and, quite near to our end, a workman's restaurant, where you might dine for almost nothing at all. And when the guests went home we could hear their receding voices, hemmed in by the high walls of the houses, as far as the Avenue de la Gare.

The sitting-room of Mademoiselle looked out over the courtyard, called by courtesy the garden. It was in this room that we had our rolls and coffee, and sometimes, if it turned out a wet evening, our dinner. It was a pink-walled apartment, the furniture covered in chaste white dimity. There were frilled muslin curtains at the windows, and little offerings from former guests on the walls and mantelshelf. In fact, it reminded one of the parlour of some convent, and

Mademoiselle, in spite of her pronounced Protestant opinions, was quite of the *religieuse* type; tall, thin, silent, and devout. I think it must have been the first time she had ever had a man staying in the house, and it put her in a flutter of excitement. When she handed my husband the hall door key she blushed quite crimson, as though there rose before her a vision of all the naughty reasons why some gentlemen stay out late. But she grew used to him at last, and when, some days after our arrival, we joined her for the first time at her frugal dinner, even ventured to speak to him now and again, though always with that Madonna-like droop of the eyelids, and half-averted head, which recalled the mediæval saint.

Nice, modern Nice, is a handsome city, huge, gay, expensive, and from an antiquarian point of view, rather uninteresting. If you have a taste for shopping, luxurious living, fashionable dressing, money spending, and time wasting, you may pass a winter very agreeably at Nice, for it is a regular Babylon of fashion.

But there is another Nice, almost unknown to the foreigners who frequent the Promenade des Anglais and the palatial hotels at Cimiez. And yet it lies not a stone's throw from the Place Masséna. I found my way there on the morning after my arrival. We had been loitering aimlessly about the gardens, already

tired of the splendid monotony of palms and cannas, when presently we found ourselves on the Quai du Midi, near those curious flat-roofed houses, called Les Terrasses, whence Milin enjoyed his "coup d'œil ravissant." It was not one of those scintillating mornings one associates with the Riviera. The sea was grey rather than blue, and a faint haze lay over the water, giving it just that touch of mystery one sometimes longs for on the Côte d'Azur. Before us loomed the Castle Rock, and at its foot the little cove of *les Ponchettes*. It was here, on the shelving beach, that the first Greek settlers drew up their boats, just as fishermen do to-day. They were colonists from Marseilles, and with them they brought an image of their goddess, Diana of Ephesus. With her powerful aid they finally conquered the people of the land, the Ligurians, who for so long had had their stronghold on the great rock above. But it was a hard struggle, and when, finally, the aborigines were driven out, and the Greeks built their Acropolis on the ruins of the old encampment, they called the place Nike, or Victory, in memory of the great deliverance their goddess had brought them, and Nike it remained—Nike or Nice, the Place of Victory.

We climbed, presently, by the great stairway, to the top of the rock, and found what must once have been some interesting remains of the mediæval castle. But, unfortunately,

the ruins have been repaired and decorated and turned into a public garden, while on what was once the donjon keep, booths for the sale of tourist mementoes are set up. Still, it is a beautiful quiet spot, where one may sit unmolested by bands or motor cars, and think of the old days before Nice became a fashionable winter resort.

As I have said, in very early times, the Ligurians, who were the first inhabitants of Nice, had their dwellings on or in this Rock of the Castle ; and, later, it is probable that the earliest Greek settlers lived there. But, as times became more settled, they began spreading down into the plain, and the old hill town became a mere fortress to be used in time of need. And a fortress it remained, developing, as centuries followed each other, into a great and impregnable castle.

As for Nice itself, it shared the vicissitudes of the other towns of the Northern Mediterranean coast, was conquered by the Goths, the Visigoths, the Franks, the Romans, the Lombards, the Saracens. Like all border cities, it was a bone of contention between France and Italy, sometimes belonging to the Dukes of Savoy, sometimes to the Kings of France. But the sympathies of the Niçois were far more Italian than French, and most of the history of Nice is connected with the efforts made by the inhabitants to defend themselves against France.



It was in 1543, during the reign of Francis I, that one of the most stirring episodes connected with this castle took place. The French had united with the Turks, under Kheir-ed-Din Barbarossa, ruler of Algiers. Already they had ravaged the coast of Italy, and now met before Nice, held just then on behalf of the Duke of Savoy. Barbarossa, in spite of his hundred ships, was not anxious to begin the siege, not knowing how his allies would behave. The Turks had no opinion of the French soldiers; they had heard how they had already been beaten back by the Genoese under André Doria, scarcely escaping with their lives. However, after a little hesitation, the struggle began. The town was soon taken, the Turks capturing 2500 prisoners, whose fate is too terrible to contemplate. But the castle, the old castle upon whose ruins we are sitting this autumn morning, still held out. Built on its inaccessible rock, dominating the sea and the surrounding country, it was impossible to undermine it, equally impossible to bombard it, and almost as hopeless to attempt to storm it. The commander, a veteran who had grown white in the service of his master, the Duke, had taken a mighty oath to die rather than yield.

"My name is Montfort," he replied, when called upon by the Duc d'Enghien and Barbarossa to give in his submission—"My

name is Montfort, the arms of my house are stakes, and my device '*I must hold fast.*' "

In vain the Turkish leader raised his culverins against the castle. The defenders riddled the sandbags, on which the machines had been raised, with bullets, so that they sank down, and the sand, carried by the wind, blew into the enemy's eyes and blinded them. So the garrison continued to hold out, till one day a shout was raised, for, from the donjon roof, someone had caught sight of the ships of the Duke of Savoy, as they came sailing over the blue waters. And a cry of dismay broke from the besiegers, who hastened, discomfited, to their vessels, and, spreading their sails, made off with all speed to Constantinople.

Sitting up there in the sunshine, we think of all manner of people connected with the castle—Lords Grimaldi, Dukes of Savoy, Popes, Kings. Last of all, we remember the Duke of Berwick, that "Grand Diable Anglais," son of James II and Arabella Churchill. His dark handsome face, so like that of his grandfather, Charles I, rises vividly before us as we look around. For it was he who made the castle the heap of ruins it is to-day!

From the Castle Hill there is a way leading down past the cemetery, a strange, un-English cemetery. The dead lie in tombs cut in the rock, with little marble chapels set in front, each with its tiny altar, upon which is a

cross, flowers, and often a portrait of the deceased. Above is carved the name of the family, and sometimes an inscription such as the following :—

“ Mais il était du monde  
Où les plus belles choses  
Ont le pire destin,  
Julien a vécu ce que vivent les roses  
L'espace d'un matin ! ”

Some of the chapels are quite magnificent, having been erected *à perpétuité*, as they informed us in letters of gold ; others are not yet occupied. Some have little black curtains drawn over the entrances, and one or two are closed in by bronze doors. I should like to see this cemetery by moonlight. It must be a weird experience to wander down the alleys, between the rows of white marble chapels, and call the dead forth by their names. I am sure that I should see more than one black curtain lifted by a skeleton hand, bronze doors would silently open, and, behind every altar, the stone, closing the tomb, would roll away to allow the ghostly occupant to come forth and gaze upon me as I passed. I should want some very strong-minded person with me !

It was almost midday as we left the cemetery, and found our way down into the old city which lies at the foot of the Castle Rock. The steep path gradually changes into a steep street, broad and ill-paved. The trees

and stone walls give way to high shabby houses, till we find ourselves in the maze of crooked lanes, deep courts, and staircase alleys which constitute old Nice. The houses are mostly built in six storeys, so that the streets run like deep cañons between high walls covered with their green shutters, bird cages, fluttering clothes, blankets of every colour. Here and there a vine has been trained across, or a blue or brown sailcloth stretched from house to house, to protect some vegetable stall from the sun; and the women lean from their windows laughing or quarrelling with their opposite neighbours, calling down to the children from time to time. It is best to walk in the middle of the street or you may find yourself drenched with a bowl of dirty water before you know where you are. And when a waggon passes, what shouting and excitement! The women and children scatter like a flock of chickens, sheltering in the first doorway they can find, or flattening themselves against the wall while the wheels go past within an inch of their toes. At intervals, streets lead up to the castle, narrow stairways, where fat old women with blue aprons, and tightly-wound black hair, sit sewing and gossiping. Sometimes the main street breaks into a little square, shadowed by an ancient tree, beneath which sit the fishwives. Here it meets with other narrow thoroughfares, which go meandering

and twisting in yet more intricate confusion, till they open on the quay, where the fruit and flower market is held every morning.

All my readers will know the Nice flower market, with its carnations, and violets, and roses. In the early morning, beneath the glittering southern sky, it is one of the chief wonders of this Mediterranean shore. But this morning the quay is deserted, save for the ordinary passer-by, for the flowers have long ago been sold, and are already far on their way to markets of the north. I met some of them a few weeks since, outside Victoria Station, a little company of pink carnations. It was foggy, an east wind was blowing, and they looked so homeless and desolate among the hurrying crowd of foreigners, that I could not help buying them to take to an old countryman of theirs who was lying sick in the French Hospital in Shaftesbury Avenue. His face lighted as he saw them. "They are from Provence," said he, and a mist came into his eyes as he looked at the wilted flowers, for he, too, was an exile in a foreign land.

## 2. EZE

A few miles to the east of Nice, perched on a high and almost inaccessible cliff, is the ancient fortress of Eze. One comes upon it when driving along the Corniche Road, though even then it keeps itself proudly aloof and has to be ap-

proached on foot. For ourselves, we reached Eze from the lower road, and a stiff climb we found it. For some distance we clambered up the side of the cliff, treading the rosemary under foot till the air was perfumed like a church after a festival. It was a misty afternoon, with the sun shining through clouds. As we mounted higher the grey-blue waters below spread out farther and farther to infinity, and the profiles of the headlands and promontories rose transparent against the western sky. Suddenly the path turned and plunged into a wild rocky gorge. Up and up we clambered, while behind us followed the mist, a thick hot mist, a grey fog, which blotted out the sea, the cliffs, filling the valley, up which we were making our way. Just before it closed in upon us we looked upward, and there, high on the summit of a towering crag, we saw Eze. But only for a moment ; then the fog wrapped us in its stifling folds and left us to stumble on blindly.

It was quite sudden when at last we reached it. A sound of voices coming from the cloud above us, a cow bell, the barking of a dog, and still nothing to be seen but a yard or two of rough track leading from the fog below into the fog above. Next moment we found ourselves on a little terrace in front of a frowning gateway, which I afterwards discovered to be *la Porte du Maure*.

"Mauvais temps," remarked a voice, and, peering in the direction whence it came, we made out the forms of two old men seated on the wall smoking.

"Is there an inn?" we panted anxiously, realising the hopelessness of discovering anything for ourselves in such weather, and were assured that we should find what we required, *au bureau de tabac*.

*Le bureau* was quite in character with the place, built, like Rahab's house, on, or in, the outer wall of the town, so that from the window you looked straight down into nothingness. If you fell out you would drop into the sea, for all I know, for below is a void filled, just now, by rolling billows of grey, unfathomable fog. Sitting there, the room seems, like Mahomet's coffin, to be hanging between heaven and earth!

There were women in the dark low shop, and an Italian pedlar, drunk, but still handsome. There were many things for sale besides tobacco; for instance, macaroni, rat traps, sardines, shoes, eggs, postcards, lemons, wine. Over the counter hung a paraffin lamp, which obtruded itself offensively, together with unseen stores of bacon and cheese.

Above all there were the women, dark, handsome, Saracenic women, with inscrutable eyes, and raven hair. I wonder if Rahab kept a general store on the walls of Jericho? Our arrival out of the fog, at that time of the

evening, seemed to surprise them. Where had we come from? Nice? Mon Dieu! it was a long walk! They wondered whether we should find our way down in the fog, the path was very rough.

"Yes," said I, "but we are not in an automobile!" The observation seemed to tickle the pedlar's sense of humour, and he laughed again and again immoderately. "No, no!" said he, poking my husband in the ribs, "it is not a road for an automobile!" and again he burst into an uncontrollable fit of chuckles. They had come to a unanimous conclusion that we were English, but could not agree about my age, *Rahab* giving it as her opinion that I was forty, the other woman and the pedlar maintaining that I must be younger to walk so far.

The women, after a time, lost their suspicions of us, and told stories of Eze.

"It is not always sombre as it is to-day," said *Rahab*. "Often the sun is so strong that the Devil comes here to pick strawberries when hell grows a little too hot!"

Like most places which have been the centre of pagan cults, Eze is haunted by these legends of the Evil One. He has left his mark on certain rocks; the very fog we were experiencing arises from his cauldron. Above all, he once built his bridge over the ravine which separates the village from the opposite hill, and was rewarded for his service in the



usual ungrateful manner, a black sheep-dog taking the place of the human sacrifice he had, as the ancient god of the valley, every right to expect.

Presently the pedlar, who had long ago lost what little French he started with, proposed that, if we waited till he had finished his last cognac, he would, for a consideration, show us the way down. It was an embarrassing suggestion, and leaving it undecided, we paid our reckoning and vanished into the fog.

It was just the evening to see Eze. Fortified by the wine and lemonade we stumbled about blindly, groping our way past evil-smelling doorways, and beneath mighty bastions. Arches spanned the narrow streets, steps led upward and onward. Now and then a light would gleam from a window and show us ancient machicolated walls, or the basement of a Saracenic tower. Somewhere near the summit of the rock we came upon a church, closed, silent, and dark. On the wall a notice was posted :—

### LA TROUPE ARABE,

Ben Menadi

4000 places.

The church probably occupies the site of still older worshipping places, perhaps the temple of the goddess Isis, after whom Eze was named, and the mosque which the

Saracen invaders erected in the middle of the eighth century.

We managed to avoid the pedlar, and, as the sudden dusk fell, turning the grey fog into a black funeral pall, issued from the Porte du Maure and began our downward way. The pedlar was right. It was not a road for a motor. The only possible method was to fix one's eyes on the next step and plunge forward into the unknown. I do not know which was preferable, the rough, boulder-strewn track above, or the slimy mud of the forest path which followed. The trunks of the pine trees rose on either side, in ghostly ranks, and as we slipped and floundered downwards, lightning began to flash, thunder boomed and rattled. Then, quite suddenly, we stepped down out of the cloud and saw, lying far, far below, Villefranche, with its lines of glittering lamps, the lights of battle-ships dancing on the water, and the semaphore flashing its message out to sea.

## CHAPTER II

### PIERA CAVA

A GORGEOUS autumn morning! The stout *bonne* Marie has served our breakfast at six o'clock, and at half-past we start off, into the sunshine, for Piera Cava. Nice is already awake, and the flower market is in all its glory. Our great motor—we had engaged our places the night before—is continually being stopped on its boisterous way through the streets, now by a sand-cart which must be emptied before we can proceed, now by a waggon of fir-cones which refuses to move out of the way; now a company of soldiers on rough and unkempt horses forms a seemingly impassable barrier. Finally, after stopping to fill up with petrol—one has always to take the precaution of filling up outside a town rather than in, to avoid the Octroi—we branch off to the right, and so up into the mountains.

The villages lie in the sunshine, among the vinedraped pergolas. Giant olive trees, whose delicate silvery foliage is exquisite against the grey rock or pale October sky, line the

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road, their gnarled and twisted trunks like a procession of old and crippled beggars at some Breton festival, reaching out their deformed arms imploringly to us as we pass. And all the while, through the lichen-tinted leaves, the royal purple of the mountains can be seen, for we are climbing higher and the world of Nice and the rest of the Riviera lie far below, out of sight and forgotten. Oh, the glory of the mountains, the freshness of the air, the life-giving energy of the sunshine!

Here is l'Escarène, wonderful, with its bridge and ancient church. I heard a story at l'Escarène of a peasant who caught the Devil in a tub of birdlime. Sir Nick had been giving a world of trouble to the good people of the district. It was the old story of drunken husbands and rebellious wives, and the Devil, as usual, sat on the fence and encouraged both sides. An old man had just died, a notorious evil liver, and Satan was on his way to fetch the wicked soul.

I think it was a man of Contes who contrived the thing. Leading his donkey, laden with a tub full of birdlime, the wily Contois set out for l'Escarène. It was night, and so black he could scarcely see a step in front of him. Suddenly, two flaming eyes shone through the darkness, and the peasant found himself caught by the throat. It was just as he intended—Satan had mistaken him for the old reprobate of l'Escarène. Shaking the

Devil off, he seized the tub, and held it in front of him as Satan was about to make his second spring. Next moment he had the Devil fast lamed, and was slipping a stole, which he had had the precaution to dip in holy water, round the monster's neck. From that time things began to mend. The women became tractable, and the men confined their drinking to Sundays and festivals, and when at last the Devil escaped from his confinement he went down to the coast, where he found plenty to occupy him at Nice and Monte Carlo.

Above l'Escarène the valley narrowed down to a gorge, and the towering cliffs on either side were veiled in foliage, scarlet, crimson, and orange. We felt as though we were threading our way into the innermost recesses of Aladdin's palace, so gorgeous were the tints with which nature had decked this remote valley. Once, among the jewelled bushes, we came upon two mules with gay trappings, and a couple of handsome dark-eyed women in blue skirts, their broad flat straw hats slung over their arms; and in the very heart of the glen, just where the cliffs seemed to meet and bar further progress, Luceram surged up from the depth, like an incredible fairy fortress. It is said that ages ago some tribe wandering in the recesses of the valley, having given themselves up for lost, happened suddenly to glance upward and saw a fire

shining on high. "See! The light!" they cried. And when later they founded their village on the rock where the miraculous fire had appeared, they called the settlement *Luceram*, or the Place of Light.

Imagine a gorge so deep and narrow, that, unless one is standing on the bridge that spans it, one cannot catch a glimpse of the torrent which can be heard foaming below. Jutting from the enormous wall is a crag, and on this crag some brigand chief of old has built his eyrie. It is a ruin now, but in the course of ages houses have gathered in the lower crannies of the rock, climbing up, one over another, till they reach the castle and the church.

Until comparatively lately no wheeled traffic came to Luceram, but mule tracks from all parts met and still meet here, climbing the village to the tiny *place*, and branching out in all directions. You can see them winding over the mountains, the laden mules picking their way like goats among the rocks and boulders.

Many, many times has Luceram changed owners since man first took it from the beasts, and established his dwelling on the great rock. It became a Roman outpost, was conquered successively by the Goths, the Burgundians, the Lombards, the Franks, the Saracens. And all these conquerors have left their mark on the people of Luceram. They are a

strange mixed race, dark-eyed, dark-skinned, bold and sturdy. From their Saracen conquerors they have inherited certain customs, notably a curious dance, a sort of galop, called the Mauresque, which they perform to the sound of a fife and a drum.

I do not think I am more nervous than most people, but if I went again to Piera Cava I should mount the road beyond Luceram on foot. It is a series of hairpin turns of the most startling description, and when our motor met a waggon drawn by four skittish horses it was not pleasant !

But the colours ! As we rose higher, and the hills sank lower, we seemed to enter a new world, a world which the fashionable traveller through these regions never sees, for few visit the Riviera in autumn. A blue mist arose and hid the country through which we had passed, leaving us alone on the hillside with the road going still upward. And all around were the rainbow mountains. Sometimes, through an orange-tinted chestnut or scarlet medlar, we would catch sight of a blue scintillating radiance, very far off in the south, and remember that the same sun was shining on the Mediterranean, at Nice, and Monte Carlo. But for the most part we were alone with the trees and the mountains and the sweet fresh southern air.

Alone, for when we reached Piera Cava there was no one staying there. All the glory

had apparently been arranged for our special benefit. These chestnuts and wild cherries had donned their gorgeous Oriental wrappings for the sake of a couple of mad English, who chose to visit the Riviera in the dearest part of the dead season. And the sun smiled down upon us, and the little wild pinks gathered round to stare up at us, till we felt almost ashamed to think that dear old Mother Earth had taken so much trouble on our account.

I am sitting on the very highest point among all the splendour. One feels transfigured, a new life runs through one's veins. The sun is hot, drawing out the scent of the pines, the wind from the snow mountains blows cool and delicious, a faint breath of the sea touches one's lips with salt, one wants to shout, to laugh, to do something foolish and mad.

There is an inn at Piera Cava; indeed, I am afraid I must call it an hotel! Antonia told us its merits in glowing terms. Antonia was somewhat of a character. Her enthusiasm for Piera Cava knew no bounds.

"If you could have seen me when I came here, Madame," said she. "A mere bag of skin and bones. And now, will you believe it, *forty-six bedrooms* to arrange in the season, and thirty-five breakfasts to take up, not counting the hot water! Assistance? *pas du tout!* I am never tired in this air. Besides as I say to Madame, what is the use of young



girls. Their heads will all the time be turned towards the barracks."

She told of a *poitrinaire* who arrived very ill, "so ill that we all exclaimed, as she descended from her carriage, 'Ah, Mon Dieu ! Mon Dieu !' For three seasons she came, and now this year she has not arrived ! Why ? She has no need ! And there was the baby from Tunis——" In fact, it was like reading the report of some air-cure establishment ! Then she spoke of the hot summer, with its flowers, of the winter days, with their frost and snow, of the avalanches that rushed down from mountains, sweeping all before them, of the ski-ing and sledging, when the great fires roared up the chimneys. "And always the sun, Madame, always the sun." When I told her that I was going to write a book about it all, she grew so enthusiastic that she left her work and took us out into the painted woods, where we found young girls washing by the streams, and knitting women wandering with their goats and cows. And I heard of the old, old days when *Piera Cava* was nothing but a tiny hamlet, and *La Reine Jeanne*, that great heroine of Provence, used to come and spend the summers there.

Then, as the shadows began to grow longer, the gold more vivid, the metallic mountains transparent and ethereal, we set off on our way homeward, the great car poking its nose inquisitively over the precipices in the blood-

curdling fashion of its kind. It was even worse going down than up. One had a clearer view of the kind of death which awaited one, supposing anything went wrong with the brakes. However, all went well, and in course of time we reached Luceram, where, after offering thanks to the gods of the mountains for a safe deliverance, we proceeded, by easy gradient, past l'Escarène to Nice.

## CHAPTER III

### I. TOURETTES

AMONG her other attractions, and they are many, Nice has the advantage of being easy to get away from. A short walk to the Place Masséna, and one finds an electric tram starting for almost anywhere.

It had been raining that morning, but it was not yet eight o'clock, and the weather was already showing signs of clearing. The washerwomen were laying out their linen to dry on the stony bed of the Paillon, and there was a breadth of blue over the Castle Rock, enough to make breeches for at least three Dutchmen. Our compartment—the tram consisted of several, quite a little train, in fact—was crowded with women, returning, with empty baskets, from the daily market. Each had a big blue or black apron with bulging pockets, in one of which she kept her big cotton handkerchief, in the other her market book. Opposite sat a couple of old crones, from Falicon, wonderful, bent, shapeless, toothless, with rough black hair gathered up anyhow before daybreak, their skin like

leather, yet with a certain beauty lingering in their dark eyes and clear-cut profiles, calling to mind their Greek origin. We were passing the Abbey of Saint Pons, and I turned to my neighbours inquiringly. One of them had taken from her pocket a roll, and was munching it between her toothless gums. The other was busy making up her accounts.

"It is the monastery of St. Pons," said the first old woman, after she had swallowed a mouthful of roll.

"It is not a monastery now," corrected the other, putting her book in her pocket and preparing to join in the conversation. "*C'est une maison de fous.*"

"But it *was* a monastery," persisted the other, "and a pity it isn't now, to my thinking. Monks are better for the country than lunatics."

I asked who founded the monastery, but they could not tell me. All they knew was, that Saint Pons was "a *seigneur* who had his head cut off there, at the time of the Revolution, when so many lost their heads!"

"It went sailing down the river, so I've heard," said the first speaker, "with a lighted candle on each side, till it reached the sea, and floated away to Marseilles, where they buried it in the Abbey of Saint Victor."

I looked up at the picturesque building, so infinitely older than the Revolution, and thought of that Pontius or Pons, the Roman

Prefect in whose honour it had been built. He had become converted to Christianity, and in his zeal for the new faith, began destroying the idols he had until so lately adored. It was at Cimiez that he dwelt, Cimiez, with its amphitheatre and attendant abominations, Roman as Nice was Greek.

Here in the very arena where he had seen the Christians martyred, the Prefect, after his conversion, was himself beheaded, and a great Benedictine monastery grew up near the place of his martyrdom.

I am recalled to my surroundings by the shrill scream of the tram as it rounds a corner, and find myself back in this throng of well-to-do twentieth-century French peasants.

The gorge is growing more and more magnificent, the rocks almost meeting overhead, grey rocks, clothed in a mantle of green, orange, and scarlet. After Falicon, where most of the women descend, the mountains grow even higher, and we have to thread our way in and out of the gorges, as though we were following some clue. Presently the precipices draw back, there are hillsides terraced for vines, fig trees laden with purple fruit, a cypress or two. It is Tourettes, the charming daughter of that grim fortress town, the Roman *Oppidum Tourettarum*, which we see crowning the lofty hill to the east. It was at the Castle of Les Tourettes that the high and mighty seigneur, Annibal Grimaldi,

Comte de Bueil, was murdered on the 8th of January, 1621.

He had rebelled against his suzerain, the Duke of Savoy, declaring that he would rather be strangled by a Turk than live under the rule of the Duke. So, when the Italian army pursued him to his stronghold at Tourettes, with the grim humour of the times, they took a Turkish executioner with them. For three or four days the castle held out, but it was not well enough provisioned to sustain a long siege, and had to capitulate. So the Lord Annibal was strangled as he sat in his arm-chair, and his body hanged head downwards beside the castle gate.

We stopped at Tourettes for an hour or so, and had some breakfast at a funny little café down by the tram-line. I don't think it was really an inn at all, and at first, when we asked for something to eat, the woman merely shrugged her shoulders.

"Have you nothing?" I inquired.

The woman suggested eggs, olives, cheese.

"But that is excellent. And figs?"

Yes, she had figs, certainly, if we cared for them, and for grapes . . . she indicated the trellis beneath which a table was set, and I could see the huge black and green clusters hanging luxuriantly. So we seated ourselves, and immediately the household awoke. One daughter rushed off to fetch eggs, a neighbour, who was standing by, remembered that she

had some sardines, a boy was sent up into a tree opposite to gather figs, the old woman herself roused the fire, and from some corner unearthed a loaf, made one year when they happened to have a good harvest. And there were olives, and wine of the country, and butter and cheese, and, to crown all, an *omelette au jambon*, the very remembrance of which makes my mouth water.

We fed in public, like the old kings of France, all those who had taken part in the preparation of the meal being anxious to see how we enjoyed it.

Just as we began, a dog, who had evidently heard that some foreigners were banqueting in the village, made his appearance, and gracefully partook of the meal, acting, indeed, as our taster. And oh, the figs! the grapes! If one lived here one would certainly be a vegetarian, save for that soupçon of *jambon* in the omelette!

When we could eat no more, we rose, and made our way up to the castle, mounting by the very path taken by Lord Annibal Grimaldi on that sorrowful day when he fled from the Duke of Savoy.

The old village is a ruin, the peasants having deserted the rock on which it is built for the valley. No one inhabits it now save ghosts and one or two families who are too poor to live anywhere else. Perhaps it was because I had just been reading the story of

the murder in Papon, that the place seemed so uncanny. The sun was shining gaily, the breeze rustling the leaves of the vines which draped the fronts of some of the houses, and ran riot across the narrow streets; lizards darted over the walls, and one or two chickens pecked about among fallen stones; everywhere was life! Yet to me it seemed as if death still hung over the village. Surely the peasants had but just fled. It was the Duke's soldiers who had wrecked these houses and broken down the walls!

By the time we reached the castle, on the top of the rock, we were almost prepared to find the Lord Annibal hanging there head downward. To our surprise the old dwelling was still inhabited. A bell hung beside the gate, but we hesitated to pull it, though I should dearly have liked to know whether the room where the murder took place still existed.

Instead, we seated ourselves beneath two great olive trees, so old that they were almost bald, and must certainly have been standing there at the time of the siege.

From the back of the castle there is a wonderful view over the mountains to that other ruined village, Châteauneuf, whence the road descends into the valley of Contes. It is a splendid walk, but for that day we had decided to go to Levens, so we turned and began making our way back into the valley.



We had already reached the terrace, which had a commanding view down the valley, when we met a woman. It was strange to see anyone in that lonely place, and I think she felt the same, for she stared at us distrustfully for a minute or two as if she half took us for ghosts. When, however, I began asking her about the castle she brightened, and talked eagerly, glad, perhaps, to exercise her tongue. She was a woman of Nice, a widow, and only lived at Tourettes because she could not afford to live anywhere else.

"Ghosts? I believe you! The place is full of ghosts! But, then, one has no time to think of ghosts. Still, at night one does not go out of doors unless one is obliged."

In her hospitable Southern fashion she invited us into her house, her one room, with its roof caked with smoke, its blackened walls, and broken windows, and the little Roman lamp, her only light to work by, unearthed from some dust-heap. She lived with her two children, miserable, half-starved-looking creatures, with great black wolfish eyes, and masses of tangled hair. Yet for all her poverty I had hard ado to get away without taking a bit of bread and a drink of milk. . .

Later, we met another woman, a native of Tourettes, who, though living in much the same kind of style, was to the manner born, and seemed quite happy as she sat on a deserted doorstep playing with her two hand-

some boy babies. She told me that two sons of Annibal Grimaldi had been killed at the same time as their father, and buried in the valley, but I think she must have been drawing upon her imagination, for the murdered man only had one son, who, as we know, escaped with nothing save his life. I asked her about the ghosts, but she only laughed gaily. "Ghosts! *par exemple!*" she cried, "*Jésus, mon Dieu!* I have too much to do looking after my boys to think of ghosts!" To her great delight we photographed her, and then, hastening down the hill, caught the next tram to Levens.

## 2. LEVENS.

After Tourettes the road mounts higher, past little pilgrim chapels, erected long ago by pious souls, that travellers might give thanks to the saints of the mountains for protecting them on their dangerous way. There is the Oratory of Saint Clair, defender against the Saracens; the Chapel of Saint Antoine, that well-known conqueror of the Devil! In this legend-haunted region such a saint may well be specially venerated.

The grey rocks are covered with scarlet berberis, and there are ancient feathery olive trees, and geraniums as big as laurel bushes. Then the mountains recede again, gathering into a circle round a vast flat meadow, surely once the bed of some primordial lake.

It is Le Grand Pré, where the sports are held in spring. For we have reached Levens, and the sun is pouring down from a cloudless sky. Levens, with its old gateways and fortifications, and sombre market place, tree-shadowed, mysterious, where, on the first of September, the girls still dance the Farandole, in their red skirts edged with black velvet, their quaint caps, the little bunch of flowers worn behind the right ear, and the *très grand chapeau de paille*, formerly common to the district. Alas! the pretty costume is worn no longer, save on festal days. The little maid who waits on us at lunch might be a Londoner save for her honey-coloured skin, and Southern eyes and hair.

"Oh, Madame!" she cries, with Provençal ardour, "quel temps superbe! Enlevez donc votre chapeau, n'est-ce pas?" And she proceeds to relieve me of my heavy tweed hat and coat, talking gaily all the while. "Everyone said it would be wet to-day, but I replied no, and see, I win! It must have been that I felt you were coming, you and Monsieur!" and she smiles so bewitchingly at my husband that I tremble for his peace of mind!

"It is so dull in autumn, when it rains," she continues. "The Château? A mere heap of stones; but with a history, look you! Madame interests herself in legends? I, also, find them very entertaining."

As we ate she rattled on, feeding our minds and bodies at the same time. A flock of white pigeons had flown in at the open door, and strutted about picking up crumbs, fluttering on to the table, eating from our very plates.

"Pruff!" cried Louise, returning from one of her visits to the kitchen, and instantly the air was filled with fluttering snowy wings as the birds made off into the sunshine. A small half-starved mother cat, who crept timidly about in search of scraps, the girl tolerated, scraping the bones and gravy from our plates on to the floor for her. As for the dog, "l'Enfer," he was evidently one of the family.

He was a weird, apocalyptic-looking black beast, with an immense head, which he carried high on a long neck, staring yellow eyes, and ears like a hare; altogether he resembled the picture of a certain devil-dog that used to haunt my childhood, in an old copy of Bunyan's "Holy War." He had been found one winter's night outside the door, starving. No one knew where he came from, no one cared. He settled down at once, making himself useful in the tactful fashion a dog knows so well how to assume. He devoured the cat's leavings, attended to the rats and mice, barked at tramps, fawned upon visitors, kept his white shirt-front a model of neatness, and proved himself, in spite of his satanic

appearance, a thoroughly domestic and estimable character.

But it was in connection with the cat that l'Enfer specially showed his magnanimity. From time to time there were kittens. Instead of resenting, l'Enfer added to his other duties the task of minding them while their mother took outdoor exercise, or went to dinner. The whole family, whatever its size, slept on Louise's bed, and there l'Enfer would sit and watch, to see that the kittens didn't fall off. And when night came, he would seize the cat by the scruff of the neck, carry her upstairs, set her down among her hungry babies, and return to attend to the closing of the house.

After she had cleared away lunch—a simple business, for l'Enfer licked the plates, and the pigeons returned and finished the crumbs, while flies settled on every greasy spot, and cleaned up the refuse—after that, Louise returned with her hat, and we set out to see Levens.

“For it is not everyone, look you,” said she proudly, “who knows the stories of Levens as I do.”

The cat, after washing herself gracefully, had gone to sleep in a corner, purring with content. The pigeons were dozing on the eaves, the flies were crawling lazily about on the sunny floor, even l'Enfer was nodding his huge head. But he knew better than to let

inclination take the place of duty, and at the sight of the hat, rose, stretched himself, and followed us into the sunshine.

Oh, that sunshine of the Azur Coast ! The unaccustomed heat burned into one's flesh, warming one's very bones ! It was a steep climb up to the old town, and on our arrival we were glad to pause, while Louise told us the story of *Le Boutaou*, the curious round stone that lies in the Place de la Liberté, the old shadowy square of which I have already spoken. I had already heard of this *Boutaou*, as having been set up at the time when a certain Comte de Bueil was murdered in his Castle of Levens, by the people over whom he had tyrannised in a fashion too disgraceful to mention. Louise told the story, in a somewhat garbled way, saying that it happened in the days of the French Revolution, and that the head of the Lord of Bueil had been buried under the stone. I looked at the stone. It is half hidden in the ground, round and polished, by reason of the many feet which had been set upon it, for, as Louise went on to explain, it is the custom of the young men and girls of the "Brandi," as they dance the Farandole, to set their feet upon the stone, in order to remind themselves how their ancestors trampled under foot the despots who for so long had dominated them.

As Louise had said, the castle is a mere heap of ruins, a quarry out of which most

of the present village has been constructed. But there are the original town gates, and the ancient church, with its thirteenth-century screen and pillars. In fact, there is quite enough to set one thinking and wondering, which, after all, is what one asks of old towns and castles.

We were sitting up in the sunshine looking out over the deep purple valleys and shining mountain-tops which lay like a relief map around and below the Castle Hill. Close by to the right, on a little promontory, was the cemetery of Levens, a tiny white-walled enclosure. We had been straining our eyes trying to make out whether the glittering white patches on the horizon were snow peaks or clouds, when we were joined by a young man who, I think, must have been the school-master. Louise hailed him at once, and made room for him to sit beside her under one of the scarlet and golden plane trees which, like a jewelled diadem, crowned the round head of the hill. The young man told us stories of the brigands who haunted these mountains, and who, after robbing people, used to hurl their victims down into the valleys and gorges below; and of the curate of Belvédère and his attempt to rid the country of the Devil who had his stronghold in the white-capped mountains called La Montagne du Diable. It is a curious story, as showing what hard work the early Christian priests

had to clear these valleys from the pagan superstitions and practices which, for so long, continued to haunt them.

“ You see that rock in the valley ? ” said Louise, pointing indefinitely downwards. I could see nothing because the light blinded me, but my silence satisfied her, and she continued : “ It is called La Pierre Tournarelle. Many years ago, when bread was scarce, as it often was before the Revolution, there was a poor woman living down there. Her husband was dead, and she had fallen into misery. She heard her children crying for food and had nothing to give them. Christmas Eve arrived. The bells were ringing for the Midnight Mass. In every cottage but hers there was supper laid, all the good things one eats at that season. And the children cried ‘ Maman ! Maman ! ’ till she could bear it no longer. So, taking up the baby and bidding the others follow, she went out into the snow. ‘ Maman, where are you taking us ? ’ asked the children, and she answered, ‘ I am taking you to a beautiful home where you will never be hungry or cold again ! ’

“ And the stars shone down, guiding them as they made their way up the valley. Presently they stopped. They had reached a great high rock. The mother clambered up, dragging the little ones after her. ‘ Maman, have we nearly reached the beautiful home ? ’ they cried. ‘ Yes, yes, ’ said the widow, ‘ we are



almost there,' and gathering them into her arms she kissed them one after another. Then she led them to the edge of the rock, and bade them close their eyes, and one by one she pushed them over, very gently, so as not to frighten them. And last of all, she flung herself and the baby over the precipice.

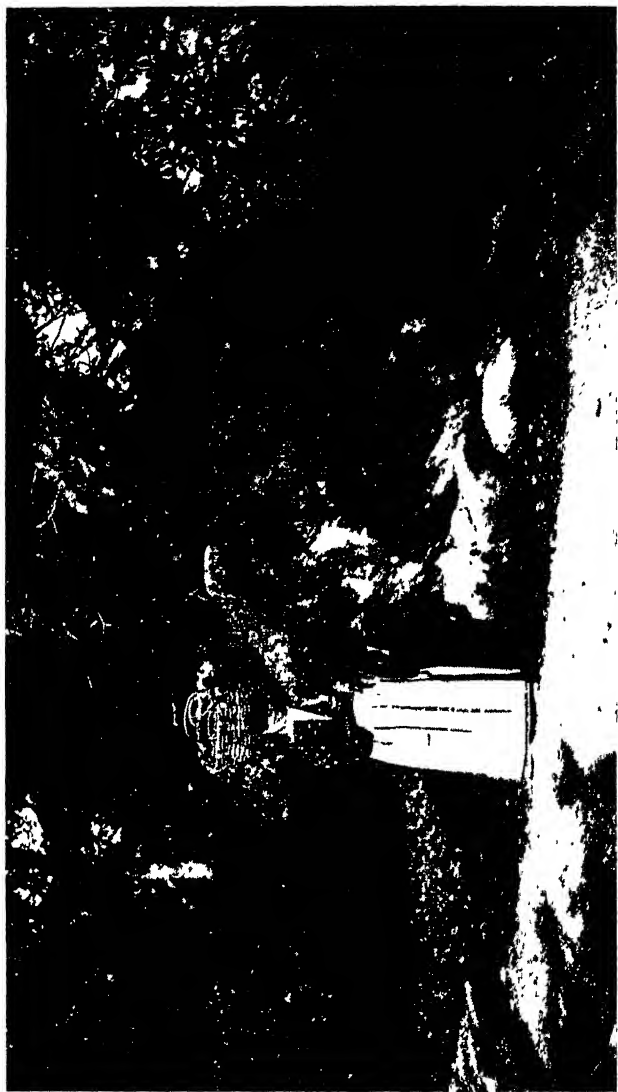
"Ever since, on Christmas Eve, the angels come down and wander round and round the rock singing, and praying for the souls of the children and the poor woman who had fallen into misery."

We rose presently, and made our way down from the old mediæval town to the site of what, according to Louise, had once been the chapel of Notre Dame des Prés. On the road we passed a shrine containing a beautiful statue of Our Lady, concerning which our little guide told us the following story.

It seems that after the Chapel of Notre Dame des Prés had fallen into ruins, the statue of Our Lady was left standing in its original position above the altar. Why? "Because it was too heavy to move," said Louise. Now there was a farmer living at Levens, a very hard and avaricious man. He had six beautiful daughters whom he employed to work in the fields. They were so handsome that they had many suitors, but whenever they begged their father to let them marry he always refused.

"Why should I find you husbands to work





LA PIERRE DES MORTS LEVENS

for," he would say, "when I can have you to labour for myself?" At last, however, he tired of their talk. "Well," said he, "I will allow you to marry, I will even give you each a good *dot*, but on condition that you carry the statue of Notre Dame des Prés from the Chapel to the village."

It is a little statue, and the task seemed a light one. I said so to Louise.

"Oh, Madame, but you are mistaken!" said she. "You might as well try to move the Pierre des Morts. They tried to lift it, the poor girls, for they wanted to be married, oh, so much! But not one of them could move it a hair's-breadth. So they had to stay with their father, who grew richer and richer, as they grew older and older till at last, when he died, all the suitors were married, and the poor girls were old maids!"

"What a sad story," said I. "And how did they move the statue at last?"

"Ah, it took many men and horses," answered Louise. "And now it is here it will never be moved again."

But the most interesting thing at Levens is the Pierre des Morts. It is a huge block of limestone, hollowed at the top to form a bath. A hole has been bored through to the outer side, to act as a drain. Beside it grows an ancient fig tree, up the trunk of which we scrambled to gain the interior. According to Louise it was in this curious and ancient

receptacle that the people of the district formerly washed their dead. Why? Was it once some sacred stone, in which it was the custom to bathe before entering an adjoining temple, the *bénitier* of pagan times: or merely a rough old bath formed by some legion of Roman soldiers who once held Levens? I could discover nothing further about it. From the difficulty I had in climbing into it, I judged that it must have been an inconvenient receptacle for the purpose for which it was used, which seems to point to the probability that this washing of the dead had had some special religious origin. In any case, it is a weird and gruesome object to find in that sunny landscape, and I sat a long time in it trying to picture the scenes which must have taken place there. After washing, the body was no doubt removed to the Chapel of the Templars, the Chapel of Notre Dame des Prés, to await burial. I could find no remains of this Chapel, and was told that it had been converted into the farmhouse which stands near the stone.

It was very solemn creeping down the side of the great ravine on our return to Nice that evening. From the window we looked down into black nothingness, and heard, far below, the sound of the torrent dashing against the rocks. The black forms of cypress trees stood out against the darkness, and in the slate-blue sky one brilliant star was sparkling. When,

an hour or so later, we found ourselves seated at our little dinner-table at the National, the noise, the lights, the crowds of passers-by confused and bewildered us, and we sat silent, thinking of the stories we had heard, of little Louise, and the dog l'Enfer, of the white pigeons who were perched upon the roof, and the cat and kittens sleeping tranquilly, no doubt, on Louise's bed. Truly, God planted the country, and man built Nice !

## CHAPTER IV

### I. MONTE CARLO

WHEN you tell people that you have just returned from the Riviera there is one question they invariably ask : " Did you go to Monte Carlo ? " Sometimes they put it in a different form. " I suppose you went to Monte Carlo," or, " Of course you went to Monte Carlo ? " If they happen to be your parents or guardians they say, " I hope you did not go to Monte Carlo ? " In any case, you will see that, for them, the central idea of the Riviera is, not so much the wonderful combination of sea, mountain, and sunshine which distinguishes this inimitable coast, but the Aladdin's palace which lies on the slope of the height crowned by the ancient Monument of Augustus. I remember telling a man, some years ago, that I was going South. I was sitting next to him at dinner, and could find nothing on earth to talk about.

" Italy ? " he asked dully.

" No," said I ; " the Riviera." Instantly his face lighted up.

## CHAPTER V

### I. LA TURBIE

UP on the heights of La Turbie stands the old Trophy of Augustus, to-day a shapeless ruin, out of whose fragments all La Turbie, and most of the surrounding walls and houses, have been built. Contrasted with the new hotel, hard by, it looks like some ragged Druid, or half-swathed mummy standing beside a smart little French dancer. Yet that chaotic heap of mouldering stones once represented the Divinity of Rome, as personified by the Emperor Augustus, who, on Le Mont de la Bataille, close by, gained a great victory over the hitherto unconquered Ligurians, and on this gigantic monument recorded their submission. There is something very impressive, even pathetic, about the ruin. It is so proud in its isolation, this great *Tropaia Sebaston*, as the Greeks called it. It was one of the greatest monuments which the Romans ever raised, and now fallen, like the power which built it.

When Millin wished to visit the Monument



of Augustus at the beginning of last century, he found it quite an expedition. He says :—

“ At three o’clock in the morning we started, with our host as guide. To begin with, we passed the garden and enclosure of La Condamine, where the road was not so bad, but soon it became detestable : the stones which fall from the rock above accumulate on the steep and narrow path, hiding the track one has to follow. At every step one stumbles or falls, so that it is impossible to arrive at the top without being bruised. The women, however, go about over these sharp stones barefoot, and climb the heights like deer. The hills round Nice are just as inconvenient : it has been remarked what a number of lame people one sees there. . . .”

We, however, saw nothing of these horrors, for, like most people of to-day, we reached La Turbie by the funicular railway from Monte Carlo.

It is a curious old town La Turbie, and more curious when one realises that it was in ancient times the Acropolis of Monaco, built to protect the Port of Hercules and the great Herculean Road. There can be little doubt that its foundation dates back to Phœnician times, for it was these early navigators who first used the Port of Monaco and constructed that fortress, of which we can still see the vestiges on the summit of Mont-Agel, Lé Muré, or, as the peasants of to-day call the ruins,



THE FOUNTAIN. LA TURBIE



Les Mules. As to the great temple which the Phœnicians dedicated to their god Melqart, or Hercules, it probably stood on the spot where the Romans afterwards raised the Trophy of Augustus, which, as likely as not, was built out of its ruins, just as, in its turn, the Christian Church of La Turbie has been constructed from the débris of the Roman Monument.

## 2. LAGHET

Outside a little inn at La Turbie we found an omnibus with red curtains going to Laghet. The day was fine, but it had rained heavily during the night; the driver, therefore, had donned his oilskins, and with his jolly red face and ample stomach, looked the impersonation of the immortal Tony Weller. After a short drive through vineyards and olive groves, we dropped into a beautiful valley, and soon found ourselves in front of the ancient Chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows.

The miraculous statue stands in a glazed niche, surrounded by gold and silver hearts, models of feet, legs, ships, babies, all kinds of things, for she is "good for everything" is the Virgin of Laghet. The great cloisters are hung all over with pictures recording the wonderful miracles which have been wrought by her. Here is an operation being performed—gastro-enterostomy, my husband suggests. It is evidently in the days before chloroform,

for the patient is looking on with great interest, as well he may, while the Blessed Virgin sits above on a cloud, giving directions to the surgeon. Many of the pictures record carriage accidents—not a surprising fact considering the character of the roads round La Turbie. Some of these offerings are as late as 1910, showing that the pilgrimages of Whitsuntide and Lady Day are not regarded merely as excursions. As we came away we met an old woman who was carrying butter to La Turbie. Seeing our camera, she took us for postcard artists, and we walked back together.

“Do you live at La Turbie or Laghet?” I asked.

“Laghet,” said she. “I may say that I am of the country, since my family have always dwelt here.”

“I suppose most of your young folk go away to the towns?”

“Yes. But, for my part, I do not approve of it. If the good God intended men to live in towns He would not have placed Adam in a garden.”

“I suppose, like everything else, it is a question of money,” I suggested.

“That is what they say,” replied the woman. “But I answer, ‘If you earn more, you spend more.’ And not only money, look you, *health*, Madame, and good looks, and other things besides! I have seen them come back to the country. Ah, Our Lady of Sorrows

knew very well what she was about when she refused to stay at La Turbie." I suppose I looked inquiringly, for she added: "Did they not tell you about it in the monastery?"

"I saw no one at the monastery."

"Sainte Vierge! what was the sacristan about? But, no matter; I will tell you—I who heard it from my grandmother, who was a great *raconteuse*, and knew all the history of the valley. It was in the days before Monte Carlo, when people were contented to live as their fathers had lived before them. There was no church there at Laghet, no monastery, scarcely a village; the people lived in the woods like charcoal-burners. One day a woman, who had been gathering sticks, saw a statue of the Blessed Virgin standing beneath a tree. Very much astonished, she ran and called her husband, who told her to fetch the priest of La Turbie, that they might know whether it was a deception of the Devil. However, after sprinkling it with Holy Water, it was seen to be unchanged, and the priest had it removed to La Turbie, and set up in the Chapel of Our Lady. But next morning the woman, going to the same place, found the statue back again. Several times they removed it, but each time it returned, till at last, seeing the hand of God in the miracle, the priest ordered a little chapel to be constructed on the spot where the statue was found."

“ And that was the beginning of the sanctuary of Laghet ? ” I remarked. “ I saw an inscription in the church saying that it was built in 1656.”

“ Ah, the present church ! ” said the woman. “ The old chapel had fallen into ruins by that time, for the people were poor. The priest of La Turbie would have moved the statue to his church, and, indeed, was about to do so, when the Good Mother once more made it evident that she preferred the country to the town. There was, at that time, living in Mentone a rich lady, a Madame Porta, who was suffering from a disease which all the doctors declared incurable. One day, a servant, who came from Laghet, related to her how her father had been saved from drowning by the intercession of Our Lady of Sorrows. Madame Porta, having a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, was much gratified, and had herself carried to Laghet, where for three days she never ceased praying in the ruined oratory. By the end of that time she was so much recovered that she gave directions for the building of the church, being careful that it should be placed exactly on the spot chosen by La Bonne Mère as her dwelling-place.”

“ What is it about Charles Albert of Sardinia spending a night at the monastery ? ”

“ Charles Albert, did you say ? I do not remember him.”

"Even you might recollect him," said I, "for it was only sixty-five years ago. He was a king. He had just lost a battle at Novara, and was going away into exile. They say he passed the whole night in the chapel praying before the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows."

"Oh, there are many of them who do that," answered the woman; "you would never believe what crowds come during the pilgrimages in April and May. Even English and Americans, who are heretics. The Good Mother welcomes them all. They arrive from Nice by the road from Trinité Victor, and Mentone, and Ventimiglia, besides Monte Carlo and Beausoleil."

"Then you don't remember King Charles Albert of Sardinia?"

The old woman considered for a moment. "I do remember something about a battle, and soldiers riding into the valley. Yes; I remember the soldiers. I was a girl then."

### 3. THE CORNICHE ROAD

We had made up our minds to walk back to Nice along the Corniche road. It was already half-past three when we left La Turbie. "But it is a magnificent road, and mostly downhill," said my husband. So, after some little hesitation, we set out bravely enough.

It is difficult to describe the feeling with which one finds oneself for the first time



walking along the Corniche. It seems to hang midway between heaven and earth, everything is either far above, or far below, nothing on a level save the smooth, broad road, leading to east and west. For a while I could not get used to the height. It was like being in a lofty balcony without a balustrade. Every time I saw my husband walking near the outer side I felt inclined to catch hold of him to prevent his falling over. Presently the sensation wore off, and I began to enjoy the matchless view. There was Eze sitting upon its hill—a very different Eze from that weird fortress I had visited in the cloud a few weeks previously. There was no mystery to-day. I could distinguish every house, even the windows and doors, and near the summit of the rock, the white church where I had seen the notice about the performing Arabs.

They are making a new road to Eze which will soon put an end to its old-world charm. But, indeed, what will not man spoil? We were walking on through this dreamland of beauty and wonder, this Paradise of colour and light, now glancing down at the shores beside which we had so often wandered, now looking out towards those “delectable mountains” which rise, range beyond range, till they fade into the western sky, when suddenly I found the view completely shut out by a hideous advertisement board, setting forth, in letters at least six feet high, the

alleged glories of a northern Casino. We were trying to recover from the shock, and had begun to admire the splendid curves of this broad road, which Napoleon formed for his army, in 1806, from the narrow and ancient route ; when, again, just at the most beautiful turn, we were confronted by three more notice boards, the Casino abomination, flanked this time by a huge advertisement of certain tyres, and a great placard extolling a new kind of automobiline, which heaven forbid I should ever try. As we went farther westward the boards grew more numerous, till they really became a thorough annoyance. How the French, with their delicate sense of beauty, can permit one of the most magnificent roads in the world to be so disfigured is absolutely incomprehensible.

Just as the sun was beginning to set we came to a restaurant. It stood looking out, over a slope, to those western mountains which lie beyond the Paillon and the Var. It had a broad balcony, and, as the road seemed already to be making up its mind to drop inevitably towards Nice, we thought we might as well rest ourselves for a few minutes before commencing the descent. So we told a slovenly-looking girl in a pink pinafore to bring us some wine, and sat looking out over the broad, changing landscape. When we started off once more the girl asked where we were going, and, I thought, seemed a little

surprised when I said Nice. However, refreshed by the momentary halt, we bowled away merrily down the hill, jeering at ourselves for hesitating over this tiny walk. "Even I didn't think it was such a trifling distance," said my husband. . . .

The sun sank lower. Then came a stretch of level, then another slight rise, at the top of which the road seemed uncertain what to do next, took an unexpected turn to the left, and we entered upon a wholly new district of the Corniche, with views and aspects all its own.

"Is that Villefranche?" I asked, pointing downward.

"No!" said my husband shortly; "Beaulieu," and I noticed he fell silent.

On and on we trudged, and on and on stretched the road in front of us. The sun sank lower, the promontories and headlands turning violet, purple, black against the glowing dahlia of the western sky. Out of the river valley rose a blue mist, wrapping the mountains in its gossamer folds till little by little they faded into the night. And still we toiled on.

Presently, on looking downward into the darkening abyss to the South, we saw the sparkling lights of Villefranche, and for a little time cheered our way by talking of the foreign fleets which have cast anchor in its hospitable harbour, for from all time it has

been one of the most important ports of the Mediterranean. It was at Villefranche that the Dukes of Savoy had their arsenal, and from thence made their attacks on Nice. To-day it is the Russians, Americans, and English who come, and the sailors of many nations hobnob in the Cafés by the quay in a way which would surprise the Villefranchians of old days. Above the dancing lights in the harbour and the illuminated jetty and quay, rose the black outline of the battlemented town, silhouetted against the warm sky. Then the road turned its back on the sea and made off to the north as though it had quite forgotten all about Nice, and had set out for Paris. However, it really had begun going downhill at last, in good earnest too, and we thought that before long we might drop into the valley of the Paillon and perhaps find an electric tram to help us over the latter part of the way. But no such luck! After making straight for the valley and rounding Mont Gros, on which stands the famous observatory we had so often seen from the distance, the Corniche turned off again southward, making direct for Nice at last. It was dark now, and we plunged doggedly on, losing our sense of time and distance, till it seemed really as if we had been walking for ever through the warm perfumed night. The road we had thought so perfect felt hard and unyielding to our tired feet. Then I got a blister on my

heel, and my husband knocked his toe against a stone. . . .

They were two very dejected-looking cripples who limped into the Rue Biscarra about eight o'clock that evening, and climbed their way slowly and painfully up the staircase to number one. We supped at home, regaling Mademoiselle with full details of our expedition, and later, as we sat bathing our bruised feet, came to the conclusion that it really was no wonder the gods looked down in such astonishment on Hercules as he made his way along by the Corniche road.

## CHAPTER VI

### I. MENTONE

THEY say that as Eve sadly followed her husband to the Gate of Paradise she stopped and plucked a bough of lemons from a tree. "They will serve to remind us of our dear first home," said she, "and, besides, lemons are so refreshing when one is travelling."

They wandered far and wide, and nowhere could they make up their minds to settle. Either it was too hot or too cold, too hilly or too flat, there was too much water or too little, too many trees or not enough. At last Adam grew weary.

"It is useless to expect another Eden," said he. "We must make the best of what we can find."

They had been travelling up the coast of Italy, and had found it very hot; all the lemons had gone save one.

"I shall keep that," said Eve, "and when at last we settle down, we will plant it beside our door sill."

They had reached a great promontory of

red rock, which stretched out into the Mediterranean, blocking the view to the west. Eve was a little in front. Suddenly Adam saw her stop.

"Look!" said she, "we have found it at last—our second Paradise."

The sun was setting behind the western hills, and the great bay, with its smooth unbroken curve, seemed full of liquid gold and sapphire. Little glassy waves crept softly to the shore, broke in a whisper, and fell asleep again. To the right rose mighty cliffs, towering one on another, their whiteness softened by the sun to rich gold and amber. Here and there, where the rock was soft, a stream had worn its way, and came clattering down over the boulders it had brought in winter from its home in the upper mountains. And between the cliffs and the sea lay Paradise.

They call it Mentone now, Mentone-Garavan, and farther along it becomes a great town, with a casino, and promenade, and splendid hotels, and shops, and every luxury the heart of man or woman can desire. Along the road by the fairy bay runs an electric tram, which takes you almost—but not quite, thank heaven—to the spot where Eve planted her lemon tree. But it is still Paradise, the most beautiful spot on all the Riviera, a place of palms and whispering waves, golden sunsets, dreams, and fairy tales!

It was an old washerwoman of Garavan

who told us the story. She was taking advantage of the slack season to wash the family linen, which, to tell the truth, sorely needed it. As she leant over the stones, beside the little torrent which divides France from Italy, and banged away at the clothes, she looked almost like some Ligurian grandmother, or even, perhaps, Eve herself, grown old and toothless.

There is a sentry-box on either side of the stream, in one of which a French *douanier* sits reading his paper, in the other an Italian, unless, as is often the case, one of them has crossed the Rubicon to play a game of dominoes in the camp of the enemy. The old woman was difficult to understand, owing to the patois she spoke, and still more to her absence of teeth. So, after she had finished, I went to ask the *douanier* for further details. But he knew nothing about the legend; only, he said, that, if I was interested in anything as old as the time of Adam, I had better visit the Barma Grande, or great cavern, at the end of the terrace path.

## 2. THE BARMA GRANDE

I have read a great deal since about this Barma Grande, and the Grotte des Enfants, and other caves with which the *Baoussé-Roussé* is honeycombed, but it all vanishes, like smoke, when I think of the moment when we first found ourselves in front of the



great cavern. The original floor or *foyer* must have been only just within shelter of the projecting rock. There they lived, those earliest of men, who had so little of the human about them that they cannot even have buried their dead, for we find no skeletons in this lowest chamber of the Barma Grande, only bones of animals, split, in order to extract the marrow. The south of Europe must have been hotter in those days, for the rhinoceros evidently lived there, and the elephant, and other creatures now found only in subtropical lands. For ages the ground floors of these great caverns, by the sea, were the home of some primitive tribe of men, but what they were like we cannot tell, for no skulls have been found to inform us.

Later, as the original entrance became blocked with *débris*, men moved farther back and higher up. They now lived by hunting, and made knives and arrow-heads, and scrapers to dress the skins, in which, as it grew colder, they began to wrap themselves. The south of Europe was changing in temperature, and the animals changed with it. The bull, the bison, the goat, the horse, and the wild boar became common, and the red deer flourished. And all the time men continued to inhabit the caves of the *Baoussé-Roussé*, growing more cunning in the fashioning of their weapons, as the difficulties of life increased with the coming of the colder

temperature. Now and again there are traces of hearths where fires have been lighted, for they had begun to cook their food; some of the bones we find are charred. Meanwhile the level of the cave had been rising steadily, and the inhabitants had been drawing farther and farther into its shelter. It was a curious idea to live on the top of the refuse of one's ancestors, but such excellent dwellings as that of the Barma Grande were hard to find.

I had been listening to all this, picking up a fragment of bone here and there, or an unfinished knife or point, when we found ourselves before a glass case covered by a shutter. The custodian turned it back, and there lay. . . . I suppose the story of the old washerwoman was still buzzing about in my head, for I shall never cease to think of him as Adam.

He must have been a very old man, for his teeth were worn to the sockets. His great, square, empty orbits yawned up at us expressively as though he were trying to tell us the story of the past—that unwritten story which we can never know. He had been a splendid man physically, well over six feet in height, with a fine forehead, and chin, and a great nose that marked him as a ruler of primitive men. And, indeed, this cave had very probably always been the abode of great chiefs, a family fortress, a royal residence, and this great man, who had been laid

there with his collars of precious engraved shells and strings of bones and teeth, was surely some mighty ruler and warrior, for he had in his left hand an immense flint knife, the sign of his office.

Behind him, for he lay on his side, was another skeleton—that of a tall young woman—and behind her, again, a great boy of over six feet. Who were they? What was their story? Why were they all buried here together, in the same grave, the signs of their sovereignty upon them? Was the young woman the wife of the old chief, and the boy their son? They certainly belonged to the same family, for on the breast of each had been placed a mysterious emblem, carved in ivory, to resemble a double olive, which probably represented their crest or coat of arms. As we looked down at them we tried to picture them alive. Here they dwelt, the same sea sounding in their ears, the same sunshine lighting them, the same rock sheltering them. There, at the back of the cave, was their hearth; the wall above is still blackened by the smoke of the fires lighted all those thousands of years ago. For, by the time this family ruled in the Barma Grande, Europe was undergoing its glacial period, and down the valleys leading to the Mediterranean great torrents rushed from the ice-fields in the Alps above.

A little higher up, and farther back, another

chief lay buried, a somewhat later chief, for his people had so far advanced as to form for him a rough tomb, a kind of early dolmen. Yet he probably was of the same race as the others, since he wore the double olive on his breast, and occupied the old family fortress.

I could have spent days in the great cave, wondering about these people. Surely if one kindled a fire on the disused hearth, and sat alone in the dusk, the spirits would come again to these dry bones, from the earth, the sea, the sky, or wherever they have dwelt during untold ages. They would come to warm themselves at the flame, to sharpen their flint knives, and re-thread their precious necklaces and armlets. And while they sat there they would tell me about their life, the history of their family, and of that terrible day when the old man died, and his young wife and son followed him to the other world. Should I hear about Adam and Eve and the coming of the first lemon tree? I wonder! At all events, it is interesting to find, just here, near this old Troglodyte settlement, a legend about our first human ancestors.

Near the entrance to the cavern a small museum has been built, to contain some of the many objects which have been found during the excavations. There are the stones used for splitting the bones of animals, the hammer stones employed for chipping flints, the marks of the blows still upon them.

There are scrapers, knives, hatchets, and everywhere bones, bones, bones.

But, for me, the interest of the Barma Grande centres in those three skeletons, lying in the grave hollowed for them in the kitchen midden raised by their ancestors of previous ages.

## CHAPTER VII

### I. SOSPEL

LYING behind the giant mountains which shelter Mentone to the north is the little ancient town of Sospel, once picturesquely named La Comtesse de Castillon. If you have travelled thither from the coast you will probably have made the journey by one of those amazing electric trams, which thread their way among the mountains of the Riviera in so startling a fashion, and you will have been too much agitated by the repeated escapes from sudden death to notice the details of the journey, until you have traversed the tunnel, which runs beneath the actual summit of the Col de Castillon, and begun running down into the valley of the Bevera. We had been hanging out of the window, anxious to catch the first glimpse of Sospel, as it lay far, far below us, when a little man who was sitting on the opposite seat suddenly leaned towards me and inquired if we were going to spend the night there. I looked doubtful.

"Because," said he, "there is a good hotel—the Hôtel de France. It is excellent."

Now, I am not fond of being directed where to lodge, but he looked so pleading, one could not resist him, so to the Hôtel de France we made our way on leaving the station. As might have been expected, he turned out to be the landlord, or rather, the landlady's husband! He was also the waiter, the wine maker, the chambermaid, the boot cleaner, and, I feel convinced, the cook. For the landlady, a fair, frizzy little creature, had no time to spend over anything but her clothes and her baby, who was suffering just then from some skin eruption and cried continuously. However, the husband saw after us, and introduced us, with an air of triumph, to a bedroom on the first floor.

"Voilà, la terrasse!" he cried proudly, flinging open the shutters. "Madame can sit here and enjoy the view."

"And the room can be cleaned?"

"*Mais, oui*, Madame, naturally. They will occupy themselves with it this afternoon."

"And I should like some water," said I. "It is my custom to wash every day, and perhaps a larger towel might be useful, since there are two of us. And would you be kind enough to tell the chambermaid to change the pillow-cases and sheets?"

"But certainly, certainly. Anything which Madame desires shall be done."







Next time we met him he was a waiter, in tucked shirt and evening suit. He brought us our meal on another terrace, and between the courses he fetched a hammer, and, turning himself into a gardener, nailed up the young shoots of the vine.

Tradition says that Sospel was founded by a certain Braus, friend and companion of Hercules, who accompanied the hero on that memorable journey of his along the Corniche road. However that may be, the town certainly existed in the time of the Romans. It was called *Hospitellum*, because it formed a refuge for those who had to cross the formidable Col Braous. In the year 859 A.D. it was burned by the Saracens, and later fell a prey to the Guelphs and Ghibellines, headed respectively by the Lords of Lascaris and Grimaldi.

There is one object which claims the attention of every visitor to Sospel—the bridge. Very seldom does one see such a bridge. It consists of two arches of unequal span, joined by a solid pier, above and upon which is built what was once the gatehouse—the fortified entrance to the town itself. The sight of this old bridge, seen by moonlight, with the mountains lying behind it, is my most enduring memory of Sospel. To-day the old gatehouse has been faced and is used as a little shop, but it is easy to picture it as it was in mediæval times, and, above all, it is

one of the most photographic objects in the south of France !

## 2. CASTILLON

Next morning we started off on our way back to Mentone, but, as the train emerged from the long tunnel which pierces beneath the summit of the Col de Castillon, we suddenly made up our minds to descend, in order to visit the ancient fortress town, once belonging to the Lords of Monaco. We left our bags at the electric station, which lies at the exit from the tunnel, and then set off on the long upward climb.

Castillon is perched on a high rock rising from the watershed, which gives birth to a brook running down to Mentone, and to a little stream that joins the Bevera at Sospel. Near the source of these rivulets is built the modern village of Castillon. But, if you wish to visit the fortress itself, you have to climb the peak, stumbling up a steep zigzag path, threading your way among fallen stones and ruined walls, till you find yourself on the Place Saint Joseph, a level halting place, from whence a vast stairway, cut in the rock itself, leads to the summit of what was once the town. A town of the dead ! Even its form has all disappeared ! Here and there you will find a roofless chapel, and at first sight some of the houses still appear almost habitable. But, as you are about to enter, a great

crack in the wall or a falling stone will warn you back, and you will continue your upward way to the little Place Saint Michel, which crowns the extreme point of the rock. It must have been here that the Castle was situated. But all vestiges have long since disappeared, and the only building left standing is the chapel of the great Archangel Michael, Lord of Heights.

Upon that rocky spur, with the birds flying below us, and, far as eye could reach, barren mountain-tops, green and grey, hung with white woolly clouds, backed by the purple of a gathering storm, we stood, trying to picture the fortress town as it must have been, and wondering at the desolation and the utter silence of the place. Quite suddenly someone spoke. It was so startling to hear a human voice in this solitude, that I wheeled round as if I had been struck. She was a very, very old woman, toothless and bent, with a face so deeply lined that it was difficult to distinguish her eyes and mouth among the wrinkles. In her hand she carried an immense blue cotton umbrella, which, from its antediluvian form and general air of dilapidation, might have been used by Noah.

"Ah! ah!" she chuckled, waving her claw-like hand around at the ruins; "Castillon!"

I nodded. "Chapelle Saint Michel," she continued, pointing to the building. I nodded

again, and inquired how long the town had been deserted. But at this she shook her head. "Italiana!" she explained, pointing to herself.

Just then, out of one of the tottering houses came another old crone, no less archaic than the first, but less Italian. She told us the story of the earthquake which had destroyed Castillon. It appeared that both these old women had been living there at the time, and the narrative sounded very graphic related by them among those fallen stones and broken walls.

"It was the 23rd of February, twenty-seven years ago," said the newcomer. "Many of the inhabitants were still in bed, for it was winter and only six o'clock. I lived in that house over there, where you see the great crack. Suddenly I woke hearing a crash, and saw that the window had fallen out! You can imagine if I waited to dress!"

"No, no!" cried the other, who seemed to have recovered a little French by listening, "there was no time to think of that!"

"We ran out as we were," continued the first speaker. "I can see it all now! The *place* here was full, full! Children were screaming! Women ran about counting them! And all in our chemises *par exemple!* Everyone thought it was the Day of Judgment, for the bells tolled and the buildings rocked! Then came another shock, more

terrible than the first ; the walls fell outwards, and all the houses on that side of the *place* disappeared over the precipice."

" And how many were killed ? " I enquired.

" That was the miracle ! Not one ! It was our good patron Saint Michel saved us."

" And who lives here now ? "

" We two," said she. " We take our choice of houses ; when one falls down we move to another ! "

" And the chapel ? "

" There is mass three times a year, at the *festas* ! No doubt it is gayer down at New Castillon, but we are nearer *le Bon Dieu* up here on the mountains ; and besides, it is cheaper. There is no rent to pay ! "

Poor old things, they were so eager to talk, to hear their own voices and ours. Even when we left them they watched us down the hill, and long after we had passed out of the region of fallen stones and *débris*, I could see the blue of the great umbrella shining high up among the grey ruins, and knew that the two old crones were comparing notes about their English visitors.

I often think of them. When there is a thunderstorm I picture them up among the clouds, and wonder if the lightning has struck their crazy dwelling. Sometimes, in the night, when the wind is howling, I fancy I can see their house rocking and shaking as in that early morning twenty-seven years ago, when

they rushed out into the *place* in their chemises. But, no doubt, as they say, they are nearer *le Bon Dieu* than we in the great world, and besides, is not the good Saint Michel still watching over them ?

## CHAPTER VIII

### I. MENTONE

MENTONE in September reminds one of a pretty girl in Hinde's curlers. She is just tumbling out of bed, still flushed and warm with her long summer sleep. The white villas and palace hotels are closed, the Casino silent and deserted ; there are no concerts, no *Matinées*, no battles of flowers, races, fêtes, or regattas, no lawn tennis by day, no fireworks by night, no frills or furbelows of any kind. In fact, the beautiful town is *en déshabillé*, and shows herself, for what she really is, the fairest of all the fair cities on the Côte d'Azur, the Pearl of the Mediterranean.

We had arrived after dark, and a storm was gathering. " Hôtel Terminus," said I to the boy who took our bag.

" C'est fermé, Madame."

We mentioned one or two others.

" Fermé ! Fermé !" said he, shaking his head.

" Good gracious, is the whole town fermée ?" I asked impatiently, for the rain was beginning to fall, and we had no umbrellas.



“ Mais Madame, que voulez vous ! It is not yet the season ! ” It was absurd, of course, but I lost my temper.

“ Back to the station, then, out of this horrible rain,” I cried. “ We can get something to eat and go on to a place that is not fermée ! ”

“ There is the Hôtel Suisse ! ” suggested the boy mildly.

“ The Hôtel Suisse is opposite the Casino. I think we were the only guests, for it was so still at night that we could hear the waves breaking on the shore, and the wind rustling the palms and magnolias in the gardens opposite.

It was raining fast when we went out to get some dinner (our own restaurant being *fermé*). We found a little place close by, humble and clean, presided over by a waiter who spoke as many tongues as the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, and a fair little girl with a doll. It was an excellent dinner, good, plain, sufficient, and exquisitely served. I think we paid 2 francs 50 centimes, including wine. The room was full, and the waiter attended to us all, while the little girl sat and nursed her doll in a corner.

Presently, when everyone had finished, and most of the guests had left, the old landlord and his wife appeared from an inner door. Then the little girl jumped down from her chair, the waiter gave a final look round to see that we wanted for nothing, and they all seated themselves at a table and tucked their napkins in their collars. The old man served,

leaving the waiter to eat in peace. It was quite a charming scene. Even the doll seemed to enjoy it, for she was too happy to eat, though the little girl placed a napkin round her neck, and tried her best to feed her.

Finding that the rain had ceased, after dinner we went down to the sea, guided by the thunder of the waves on the shore. The great promenade was silent and deserted, and beyond the parapet lay the Mediterranean, black, heaving, roaring. It was black below and black above, for the sky was full of tossed, tormented clouds, rushing hither and thither before the wind. Only on the horizon was there a break, where the moonlight had forced its way through and lay like a pool of silver on the water. Save for that ray of hope the prospects for the morrow looked as dark as dark could be. All night the tempest blew, and the rain lashed the windows. Every time I woke I heard the sea talking about it, furiously at first, then more quietly, till at last I fell into a sound sleep, to wake and find the sun forcing its way in through the shutters, and the sky that glorious sapphire one only sees at Mentone. In fact, it was just the morning to walk to Saint-Agnès.

## 2. ST. AGNÈS

Anyone who has stayed at Mentone will remember, high up on the summit of a mountain to the north, a speck of white like a

belated snowflake. It is the village of Saint Agnès, or rather, all of it which can be seen from below, for the village itself, with the ruins of the castle, remains hidden, a prize offered only to those who are courageous enough to climb the two thousand feet of rough mule-path which lead to it.

We made our way up the side of the gardens, which have taken the place of the stony bed of the Careï, always with our eyes fixed on that little white snowflake high up on the mountain-side, and so passed from the town into the Garden of the Hesperides, where the lemons and the golden apples grow.

The orange trees of Mentone are mostly cultivated for their blossoms, and are of the wild species, tall, and rather ungainly, with a small bitter fruit. The flower, however, is large and very fragrant, and is used for making perfume.

We lost ourselves, before long, in this Paradise, and had to come all the way down again to cross the valley of the Borigo. When finally we found ourselves fairly started on our upward climb we were on a ridge covered with myrtle, and daphne, and sweet herbs of all kinds. The sun was blazing down, and the perfume rose around us like incense. Up and up went the path, with everything one could possibly want except water. Oh, how thirsty we were! There were grapes everywhere, great blue luscious grapes, but our

absurd consciences forbade our helping ourselves, and presently we were rewarded.

I have said that the path led along a ridge. Just when we were at our thirstiest, we saw, a little below us, on the right, a roof emerging from a grove of peach and lemon trees. Two friendly goats encouraged us to descend, and there we found the dearest little cottage imaginable. I remember a story of two children who were lost in a wood, and found a tiny house built of cake, with sugar windows and roof of almond icing. Well, this cottage was even better, for it was covered with vines, which, in front, formed a pleasant shade where had been set a table and some stools. Beside the door a girl was busy washing.

"Can I have some water?" I panted.

"Oh, yes, Madame," and she was turning to fetch it, when out came her mother, who asked us to sit down under the vines, and brought us not only water, but fresh lemons, peaches, figs, grapes. So there we sat refreshing ourselves. It was like a meal in Eden! Presently we rose to go.

"Will you tell me your name?" I asked. "I should like to remember this pleasant place."

"It is La Vigne," she answered, "and I am Madame Gléna. Then, as I slipped a franc into her hand, "Oh, but, Madame, this is too much! Well, if it must be——" and she began loading us with peaches and grapes till we made our escape.

Not long after this we saw on the road two young girls and their mother. They, also, were on their way to Saint Agnès, but were quite exhausted with the climb. So we handed over the fruit to them, and I never saw people so grateful. They were almost purple with heat and thirst, and could hardly wait to thank us before beginning to eat. And so, little by little, we climbed up the steep zigzags to the grey old Saracen village.

It lies quite hidden behind a rock; one does not see it till one is almost there. And yet it looks down over all the country. The final climb leads past a little chapel, used in these days as a shelter for mules, to the washing-place and the frowning Saracenic gateway. And still we climbed and climbed. For Saint Agnès clings to the side of the steep rock, nestling into the cracks and crevices, perched on the crags and boulders, a bewildering maze of dark and narrow stairways, spanned by heavy arches. Here and there black passages lead up or down, from the main stairway, to evil-smelling doors, and houses haunted by memories of those days when Haroun the Saracen ruled in the castle above.

The white snowflake had long ago resolved itself into a new hotel. But we were too tired and anxious for our lunch to go an unnecessary step, and stopped short at the Restaurant Victoria, which we had noticed high above us as we approached the village. The front

door opens on to what is called the Grande Rue, the principal staircase of Saint Agnès, and the back rises sheer up from the precipice over which the village is built. The little inn is charming. There are rooms to suit all states of weather, a *salle à manger*, with a stove for winter ; a glass balcony for spring and autumn ; and an open terrace for summer. The host, like most of the inhabitants of this isolated village, was of Saracen type, with a soft voice and charming manners that recalled the East. Being warm with our climb, we wanted to lunch in the open air, but this he would not hear of. It was not the season ; we were too hot !

He had married a Swiss, and his wife had gone home to find a servant, so we must pardon all deficiencies, for he was alone, and his cooking but indifferent. And all the while he was serving us with an adorable hospitality which made his every action a caress. In his Eastern style he brought towels and warm water for our hands, closed the outer door which I had opened—" Pardon, Madame, not yet ; you are still heated with the ascent "—set a footstool for me, helped me off with my hat and veil, and from some magic kitchen, which seemed to do its own cooking, produced the daintiest of little lunches, ending with a bottle of good white wine, and some of the grapes I had coveted on my thirsty ascent.

All the while he talked pleasantly in his gentle voice, telling us about the village and the coming of the new hotel, which had evidently been a great blow to him.

"Germans, Madame!" said he, with an indescribable movement of the nostrils.

"You do not like Germans?"

Instantly his face and voice became as gentle as ever.

"I trust I love all men!" said he. "Am I not bound to, as a Christian? But *these* people!" Evidently professional jealousy ran high at Saint Agnès.

He told me that the village was very Catholic, which is interesting when one remembers the legend of its foundation. I heard the story later, from his own lips, as we sat on the summit of the rock among the crumbling walls of what was once the castle. For, after showing us his dainty little house, with its five neat bedrooms, its well-stocked linen closet, bathroom, kitchen, and terrace garden, he locked the door upon his household gods and became our cicerone.

The rock, immediately above the village, becomes so steep and sharply pointed, and the country lies so very far below, that one is quite giddy before one gains the final crag, on and around which the Moorish castle once stood. What a position! One can look down over the whole district, and see the paths winding about on the arid mountains, for

Saint Agnès stands high above the region of forests. Far below to the east one can see Castellar on its tree-covered hill, and there beyond is the Red Rock, the Baoussé-Roussé, where are the great caves. Garavan and Saint Louis lie out of sight behind those two green hills to the south; but we look right down into the port of Mentone, and can see the boats floating at anchor, and the old town with its church of Saint Michel and ruined castle. As for modern Mentone, with its white houses and red-tiled roofs, it lies spread out like a map on the border of the immense blue sea, which, seen from this height, seems to fill half the sky. And there is Cap Saint Martin, with its forest-covered hills, and, in the valley to the west, the winding road to Gorbio. Northward are mountains, snow capped and valley riven, and one knows that, for nearly two hundred miles, mountain follows mountain in bewildering succession, till they gather into the tremendous masses of Pelvoux and Mont Blanc. No wonder that the Saracen chief, as he came sailing into the port of Mentone, noticed the commanding pinnacle of rock, and decided that upon it he would build his fortress, his *rebath* or *fraxinet*.

He was a great pirate, this Haroun, and had been pillaging all the coast of the Mediterranean. Besides much plunder, he had on his ships many captives, among whom was a beautiful young Provençale named Anna, and



it is the story of this Anna and Haroun which forms the romance of the Castle of Saint Agnès. As we sat among the ruins our host told us the old legend.

Anna was a Christian of Marseilles, accustomed to worship in the ancient crypt beneath the Church of Saint Victor. She had seen her father and both her brothers killed by the Saracens, and now found herself alone in their power. But she was so beautiful that Haroun could not make up his mind to treat her as the other slaves were treated. Instead, she was taken into his own ship, where his old mother looked after her, and from day to day the chief went to her cabin to try and console her. But Haroun had a wife, Sarah, who accompanied him on his warlike expeditions, and Sarah very much objected to the presence of the beautiful Christian on her husband's ship. So one day, when they were sitting at supper, she taxed him with it.

"You are changed, my husband," said she ; and, as he denied it, "I can tell you the cause. It is this infidel maiden, who has worked her spells upon you. Do you think I have not marked you stealing to her cabin day by day ? "

Haroun must have been very simple, for he appeared quite dumbfounded.

"You are in love with her," continued Sarah venomously, as she watched his confusion.

“ No ! no ! ” said the Saracen ; “ I protest ! ”

“ She shall die ! ” concluded his wife.

The story goes on to tell how Haroun, knowing Sarah's cruel disposition, rushed to Anna's cabin and found her already gagged and bound, about to be cast into the sea. The sight made him furious, and he only stopped to free her before beginning his vengeance. Sarah he strangled that night with his own hands, and the slaves who had bound Anna were tied together and thrown overboard. Then, somewhat pacified, he set sail eastward, and next morning cast anchor in the beautiful Golfe de la Paix, called to-day the Bay of Garavan.

It was not so very long since the days when a shipload of pirates from the island of Lampedusa had landed and settled themselves on the western headland. There, near the ruins of the old Roman Lumone, they had built a fort, the nucleus of the present town Mentone. But Haroun did not stop on the coast. He had noticed, pointing high up into the sky, a needle of grey rock, suitable only for an eagle's nest, and there he had determined to build his *fraxinet*. They say that it was finished in a month, and certainly the Saracen builders took little pains to level the rock, or make a path to the summit. What it was like it is impossible to tell ; the ruined walls and scattered stones keep their own secret. Only the legend of Anna has survived, for

Haroun brought her up to his eyrie in the hope that she would learn to love him.

But this was rather much to expect even in the tenth century, when girls were not so fastidious as they are to-day. It was not only that Haroun had stolen her from her home, after murdering her father and brothers. He was an infidel, a follower of Mahomet, a believer in the Koran. Even if Anna could have overlooked his other deficiencies, this last consideration seemed insuperable. The story of the Saracen invasion of southern France has come down to us entirely through Christian sources, and we know with what horror the followers of the Prophet were regarded. So Haroun found that his suit did not prosper.

First, as a good Mussulman, he tried to convert Anna to his own faith, but without avail. Then he became ill; Anna liked him better so, and sat long hours with him, telling him of her home at Marseilles, and expounding the doctrines of Christianity in her sweet voice, till he began to think that really there was truth in all religions, and that one must not be too narrow-minded and exclusive.

But, whenever he spoke of marriage, Anna drew back.

"I can never marry an infidel," said she, and Haroun was more hopelessly in love than ever. At last the day came when he could bear it no longer.

"What is my heaven going to be worth?"

cried he. "You will not be there! Let us go to hell together."

Anna was shocked but gratified, and that night, gathering all his money and jewels together, he took her and his mother down to the port of Mentone, where a ship was waiting, and they were soon on their way to Marseilles.

It was long since Anna had had the opportunity of attending Mass, and next morning she hastened to the Crypt of Saint Victor. You may go there to-day, and find it unchanged. Ghostly passages lead off into the darkness, tombs of saints and martyrs honeycomb the walls, and a black statue of the Virgin, accredited with wonderful powers, reigns over the altar of Notre Dame de Confession. They say that this statue has stood there for nearly eighteen hundred years, and that it is only during the last century it has tolerated the presence of a woman in the chapel. A story is told of a certain princess who was struck with blindness on approaching the altar, and only restored after she had surrounded the chapel by a silver grille.

There are other legends recorded of Notre Dame de Confession, better befitting the old statue of Diana of Ephesus, once worshipped in Marseilles, than that of the gentle Virgin of Bethlehem. Formerly, when there was a drought, the Black Virgin was taken up into the daylight, and carried in procession round

the city, with the result that rain fell plentifully within twenty-four hours. Even to-day the Feast of the Purification is never celebrated in the upper church without the presence of the statue, and it is the custom of the mothers of Marseilles to carry their children down into the Crypt and make them take their first steps before the altar of *La Bouéno Méro Négro*, the Good Black Mother.

It is not likely that Anna ventured into this sacred chapel, but she may have knelt behind the silver grille. And, as she prayed for guidance, she may have been strengthened by the remembrance of that heroic saint Eusébie, who, only a short time before, had, together with her nuns, cut off their noses to render themselves unattractive to these same Saracen invaders, and had been massacred and buried around this chapel of the "Martyrs." The Martyrdom *deis desnarrados* or the Noseless Ones is still remembered by the women of Marseilles.

So, when she rose from her knees, Anna was resolved to resist Haroun to the death. But, lo! a miracle! In a far corner the worshipper of the False Prophet was kneeling in prayer, and as they left the chapel together he told her he had been instantly converted as soon as he found himself in the presence of the Good Black Mother. There was great rejoicing in Marseilles, and, as soon as Haroun had been baptized, the wedding was cele-

brated by the Bishop, in presence of Count William of Provence, who lent the young couple one of his castles for their honeymoon.

But Haroun did not live long to enjoy his happiness. Perhaps he felt lonely among these foreign Christians, and pined after the good old days when he had roamed the seas a pirate and an outlaw. Perhaps he found Anna more of a nun and less of an *houri* than he had fancied her. At all events he died a few months later, and his widow, faithful to his memory, returned to her castle above Mentone, and built a little chapel, dedicated to Saint Agnès, at the foot of the rock, that she might pray for the repose of her husband's soul.

I have given the legend as I find it in my notebook. But I cannot reproduce the voice and gestures of the old landlord. Neither are we sitting within the very walls of the fortress, looking down over the same marvellous landscape on which Anna's eyes so often rested during those days she was a prisoner!

### 3. GORBIO

We came home by way of Gorbio. A wonderful path skirts the side of the mountain, and leads, by gradual degrees, into the heart of the gorge. And there on a rock we found the old town of the Lords of Lascaris and Ventimiglia. But it was growing dusk, and we had still a long walk before us. For a

few minutes, indeed, we sat, and rested by the fountain outside the town gate, and watched the animals come to drink on their way home from the mountains. There were the cows, the great mules, with flat wine casks slung on either side, or loads of hay or sacks of corn. Here come two boys on a donkey, leading a goat by a long cord, and after them follows a little foal, all legs and head. All stop at the fountain till the space beneath the great plane tree is as full as a Saturday market. . . .

It grows darker ! Lights begin to twinkle high up in the narrow streets, and in the windows of the fortifications. The crowd of beasts is thinning. It is time to go home.

It seemed an endless walk down the valley of Gorbio, and before we had gained the road we were stumbling down the rocky mule-path in darkness. From time to time a flash of violet lightning showed us our path, but for the rest we blundered on, losing ourselves, and our tempers, and finally emerging, very tired, hungry, and footsore, somewhere on the road between Cap Martin and Mentone.

A band was playing that night, after dinner, in the gardens, and the women brought out chairs and sat at their doors listening to the music. But we preferred to walk out to the old port, and watch the great amber moon trace its golden pathway across the Bay of Garavan. As we reached the water's edge a

little boat, lying beside the quay, moved stealthily off. It was too dark to see the occupants, but, as the boat crossed the path of moonlight, I caught for a moment the glimpse of a white gown and a woman's face. Was it Anna and her Saracen lover making off into the darkness ?



## CHAPTER IX

### I. GRASSE

WE arrived at Grasse by the P.L.M., and found a funicular railway which took us up to the *Cours*.

There was positively no one at hand but a couple of little street urchins, who fell upon us, like brigands, seized our bags and cameras, and made off into the network of streets which constitute Grasse. Then began an experience rather like that of Ardoin-Dumazet on his first arrival at Grasse, only *we* had not the slightest idea in what quarter the hotel was situated. Moreover, it was night, which increased our perplexity. We had told the boys we wanted to go the Hôtel Muraour, but perhaps we had left out one of the many vowels, for after they had led us all over the town, we landed down by the post office, at another inn of which I forget the name.

By this time we, like the French writer aforesaid, were getting indignant, but with a different result, for I began asking my way systematically, every dozen yards, and so, after climbing a final flight of steps which led





GRASSE

up through the bowels of the theatre, we found ourselves at the door of the Hôtel Muraour et de la Poste, which lies about a minute and a half from the exit of the funicular railway, the point from which we had started !

We were tired, of course, for the boys were small, and we had been obliged to help carry the baggage.

But we had gained a most comprehensive idea of Grasse after nightfall. And what a strange old town it is, with its deep arcades and vaultings, its sudden terraces, steep winding stairways, and strange sweet perfumes confronting you suddenly from you know not where.

The hotel was full, so we were placed on the top floor. But, as Mademoiselle explained, the view was all the finer. Being at the back of the house, we looked down, from an enormous height, into one of the narrow streets. Our windows were so high, indeed, that we could see right over the opposite roofs, past the Roman clock tower, and the Cathedral, to that "Great Blue and Limitless Space" which lies beyond the shores of the Riviera. Every morning the sun would come and look in at our curtainless window, and the bells in the old brown tower would tell us the hour, and if we did not wake, would repeat their call, as if reproaching us with not hastening out to make the most of every minute.

Downstairs we would find the porter cleaning the hall, and the old *Martha*, with the swollen face, cumbered with much serving, "Jean having overslept himself." Then the cook would set to work, girls rush hither and thither, like chickens in a farmyard.

"Jean! Jean!" cries the one-eyed porter in an immense bass voice, and presently, very surly and sleepy, the young waiter appears in his white jacket and smartly cut black trousers, a serviette tied in carefully studied *négligé* round his neck. Then *Martha* gives him a piece of her mind! Is it to spend his days in bed that Mademoiselle has picked him out of the gutter? What sort of hotel will the English take it for? Seigneur Dieu! Seven o'clock, and the breakfast not ready! Jean waits till the first burst of the storm has subsided, and then replies with the philosophy of his sex, when found out. "Yes," says he, "I allow it is a catastrophe! But talking will not mend it. The best thing is to serve the breakfast: *Voilà tout!*"

When I look back at those golden days spent at Grasse I do not know where to begin. Shall we wander off along the ancient road to Vence and Saint Paul, or take the electric tram to Le Bar and climb to the old village of Gourdon, or shall we go by post omnibus to Castellane, or run down the valley to Cannes and visit the Islands of Lérins? All these things we must do, but I think first we had

better cast another glance at the old town itself.

It is so old that everybody seems to have forgotten its history. And yet it has a very interesting past. It is said to have been founded in the year 585 A.D. by a company of Sardinian Jews, who, having turned Christian, obtained permission to settle and build a town near the spring of water which rises in the mountain to the north of Grasse. They called their new home Gratia or Grâce, and it is so spelt in many old documents. Five hundred years later Guillaume II, Count of Arles, gave all this territory to one of his lords, called Rodoard, who, finding the Bishops of Fréjus already in possession of the coast, took up his residence, and established his seat of government at Grasse. There he built his castle, and thence he took his title. For the future his family were known as the Lords of Grasse and Le Bar. It was here that the rebel Baron of Castellane came to do homage to Alphonse, Count of Provence.

Three times at least Grasse has been ravaged, once by Saracens, once by the Barbary pirates, and again by order of Francis I to prevent its falling into the hands of Charles V of Spain. Again and again it has been destroyed, each time to arise more prosperous and beautiful than ever.

During the Wars of Religion, Grasse fell into the hands of La Ligue ; but, a few years

later, as the old historian says, "wishing to smell in freedom the pleasant perfumes of the fleurs-de-lis, drove all the Savoyards from her town, and henceforth recognised no other sovereign than the King of France."

On the 2nd of March, 1815, Napoleon passed through Grasse on his escape from Elba. He had landed, the evening before, on the shore near Cannes, and came riding up the valley with his little band of soldiers and the officers who accompanied him. The people of Grasse, having heard a rumour that mysterious strangers had landed at Golfe Juan, were in a panic, taking them for pirates. So as soon as the company came in sight they made haste to bar themselves into their houses. Slowly Napoleon passed through the empty town, and took the road toward Castellane. On a little grassy knoll, marked to-day by two black cypress trees, he paused for breakfast. It was then that the report first reached the people of Grasse as to who their visitor was, and crowding out of the town they showed their enthusiasm by loading the Emperor and his party with attentions. But Grasse has forgotten her history, and cares only for flowers and scents. The great perfumeries lie in every direction, not, however, spoiling the landscape, merely scenting the already fresh and fragrant air, and adding to the riches and prosperity of the beautiful little town. If you want to see the flowers

picked you have only to go out into the country, where you will find bands of men, women, and children at work. They arrive from a distance in families, like our hop pickers, and pack themselves away in the tall old houses. You will find as many as ten or twelve living in one room. By working early and late they earn a couple of francs a day.

The making of the essence is very interesting. We were passing the factory of Bruno Court, one of the most celebrated of all the perfumeries, when, through an open door, we saw the jasmine blossoms being sorted. The sight and scent of the great white odorous hillocks, with which the floor of the warehouse was piled, fascinated us, and we stood watching while they were passed through the winnowing machine, and sent down to the floor below. Presently a boy came and asked if we would like to visit the works, and we were introduced to a charming old woman, in a frilled net cap, who showed us round and explained the process.

On small trays a special fat is spread, and over this they lay the blossoms. The trays are then stacked one above another, in great piles, reaching almost to the roof, and left for twenty-four hours. Each day the faded flowers are removed, the fat turned over and respread, and a fresh covering of petals laid upon it. This process continues for three



months, at the end of which time the fat has become impregnated with the perfume of the flowers, and is put into air-tight receptacles containing rectified spirit, which extracts the scent. Nothing is wasted in the process. The imperfect petals, and those which are removed from the trays, are used for making an inferior perfume, prepared in a different manner, heat being employed to extract the essence. The fat, after it has been treated with alcohol, still retaining some of the perfume, is employed for the manufacture of pomades and ointments, and the making of toilet soap. I was told by a chemist that very little of the best Grasse essence ever finds its way on to the retail market, but is used by manufacturers for blending with other, and less costly, perfumes.

It is not all essences which are made in the manner I have described. Some of the more delicately scented flowers require to be crushed and simmered in hot fat. Among these are the rose, the violet, mignonette, and lilac. Others, again, are treated by distillation, as the lavender, thyme, rosemary, orange-flower, and peppermint. Often when one is driving among the mountains one will come upon these little distilleries scenting the air for a mile around. But, after all, the most striking thing connected with a scent factory is the sight of the blossoms themselves. The quantity required is incredible. Over two

million pounds weight of rose petals, and four million of orange petals are used annually. Even this gives no idea of the actual amount. One must visit Grasse the latter half of May or in June, and see the women at work picking off the petals of the roses (for it is only the petals which are used). They sit waist-deep among the flowers, and the scent of these blossoms is one of the memories of a lifetime.

Sunday at Grasse is a day of rejoicing. It begins before we are up in the morning with the carillons of the bell tower, breaking into well-known ancient canticles, which come floating in at the open window, calling us to get up. We are just on a level with the top of the tower, and can see the bells moving to and fro in their iron cage. What a day! Up in our high eyrie we seem far above the mists and sorrows of earth, alone with the sunshine and the music. Presently we leave this glittering blue and gold paradise, and descend to earth. In the little *place* before the Cathedral, people are gathering beneath the plane trees. Evidently in Grasse it is still the custom to attend Mass.

It is an impressive building, this cathedral, full of beautiful and rare pictures. But it is better than that, for it is a place of real devotion. Even the non-Catholic may here grasp the beauty and significance of the Mass, and forgetting that it is Roman, remember only that it is Christian.

There are great pillars in the nave which cast heavy shadows. There one can sit and listen to the organ, which is played with deep religious feeling, materially assisting the prayers. The old church itself dates from before the thirteenth century, at which time the bishopric was removed from Antibes to Grasse, both on account of the pirates who ravaged the coast, and the plague which was so frequent a visitor to the ports along the shores of the Mediterranean.

The most remarkable Bishop of Grasse was Antoine Godeau, of whom we will speak more fully when we visit Vence. When it is said that he was the first member of the French Academy it will be realised that he was a man of letters. He was more, he was a great poet; and, as we sat the other day among the lights and shadows of the old Cathedral, listening to the music, and moved by the beauty of our surroundings, we were tempted to wonder whether the spirit of the good little Bishop did not still linger there, directing the service in his own poetic fashion.

## 2. LE BAR

It was still Sunday. We had wandered out by the tram to Le Bar, a little town grouped on a height, around a castle once belonging to the Lords of Grasse. It stands there still, but its glory has departed, for it is used as the village inn, and we found the great halls,

where once princes and nobles feasted, full of peasants who had come up from the country to smoke and drink and play at cards.

In olden times Le Bar must have consisted almost entirely of the Castle, the Church, and the Prison, which latter rises like a heavy, headless pyramid, just opposite the castle door, and is used—how are the mighty fallen—for a garage! The church still fulfils its original purpose, and remains but little altered since the days when the family from the castle used to hear Mass there. It has a beautiful Gothic door, and inside is a very extraordinary thirteenth-century Dance of Death painted on wood.

From a terrace behind the church one may enjoy a superb view up the valley leading to the Gorge du Loup, while high up to the left on the summit of the Dent du Loup, is Gourdon, with its ancient fortress, over the door of which are still to be seen the arms of the Gordons, of whom this eagle's nest is said to have been the cradle. We sat for some time outside the door of the inn, watching the bowlers. All the world was playing; Le Bar was nothing but a bowling ground. From where I sat I could count half a dozen games in progress. They played up hill and down indifferently, the balls skipping over the rough stones in a way that would rouse an English bowler's scorn. However, the unevenness of the ground did not lessen their

pleasure ; indeed, I think the rocks only added to the excitement, which was tremendous. And all the time the old men sat and watched, smoking and drinking red or yellow *sirop*, while the women gathered in groups and discussed my hat. And, from the great hall of the castle, where the Lords of Grasse and Le Bar had once sat in judgment on the forefathers of these same peasants, came the sound of laughing country voices, the verse of a song, and the merry clink of glasses.

### 3. VENCE

The first time I saw Vence was in the rain. We had started from Nice early one morning, and the clouds began to gather before we reached Cagnes. All the way up the beautiful valley the mists kept falling lower and lower, till, as we gained Saint Paul, the sky began to empty itself, and we reached Vence in a tropical deluge, which continued the rest of the day.

Next year we found Vence basking in the amber glory of a late September morning, the roads dusted with gold from the yellowing plane trees, and the vines just touched with crimson. Seen so, it was a charming southern town, neither more nor less, and had I known it only in the sunshine I should have noted it with admiration, but with not half the interest I felt in the Vence of my earlier visit. Let me try to recall it.

The town stands on a rocky promontory, nearly a thousand feet above the sea, looking down into a deep ravine. Above, to the north, are *les Baous*, four towering heights, on the flank of one of which, *Baou des Penitents Blancs*, can still be seen the ruins of the old acropolis, *La Bastide Saint Laurent*, to which, in time of danger, the people of Vence fled for refuge. It is said that if you go there at midnight, at the Festival of the Epiphany, you will see the three Kings ride through the ruined village.

But of all the beauties which surround the town we remained unaware, on our first arrival, for Vence was a mere island floating on an ocean of cloud. Its fortifications seemed to rise out of the mists of past ages, its gateways to lead from nowhere to the only reality, the Church. For the one building of Vence is the church, the cathedral as it was, in the palmy days when Vence was a bishopric.

You enter it out of an ancient square, the Place Godeau, in the middle of which, behind a fountain, rises one of the two Phocæan boundary stones, which caused that insatiable antiquary Millin so much reflection. Apart from ourselves there is not a living person in the square, though there are many dead, for every grain of dust here once formed part of a human body ; it is the old cemetery of Vence we are crossing, the space where, even in the

days before the Roman conquest, the people of the valley laid their dead.

The church itself is not large. But how dark, how impressive, how very, very old! There has been a worshipping-place on this spot ever since the days when the Nerusians, of whom Ptolemy speaks, used here to worship their god Nereus, that "wise and unerring old man of the sea," who ruled over the Mediterranean, and was the father of the Nereides. He was a Greek god, and his worship was probably brought here by some early colony of Phoceans, who found their way up from the coast. Like all sea-gods Nereus was consulted as an oracle, and it is interesting to find an old legend, still existing at Vence, as to a hole in the church wall, through which some pagan god once spoke and foretold the future.

We found a young woman, with her baby, dusting the baptistery. She told us that *la Cathédrale* stood on the site of a Roman temple to Mars and Cybele, and we remembered how Honoré Bouche, in his history, describes an inscription recording the offering of a bull, the horrible sacrifice of the Taurobolium, at Vence. As we stood there, in the baptistery, which has most likely replaced the building in which the pagan sacrifice was offered, we could almost see the scene—the deep pit roofed with a lattice-work of boards, beneath which, in his silk robes, knelt the

priest who was about to make the expiation, the blood of the slaughtered bull pouring down upon him. Then we saw him emerge red, dripping, horrible, but sacred in the eyes of the worshippers, who kneel before him as if he were the very deity to whom the sacrifice has been dedicated. Even his stained clothes are precious, and treasured as relics by the faithful.

Such was the Baptism of Blood once offered on this spot when the goddess Cybele was worshipped in Vence. As the inscription says :—

“IDÆÆ MATRI  
VALERIA MAR  
CIANA VALE  
RIA CARMOS  
INE ET CASSI  
VS PATERNVS  
SACERDOS TAV  
RIPOLIVM SVO SV  
MPTV CELEBRARUNT

“To the Idumean Mother (Cybele) Valeria Marciana, Valeria Carmosine and Cassius Paternus, priest, have celebrated this Taurobolium at their own cost.”

As soon as the young woman had finished dusting, she caught up the baby in her sturdy arms and proceeded to show us the church itself “properly,” as she explained it, because



"I am of Vence. My family have always lived here."

Leading us to the Chapel of Saint Véran, she showed us the old sarcophagus, used as an altar, in which the saint was buried. On the front, corn, the emblem of Cybele, is sculptured, and in the middle is a medallion of a man and woman, some Roman general and his wife perhaps. I asked our guide who they were.

"It is Saint Véran," she answered readily. "In those days bishops married; the other portrait is that of his wife."

In a tomb before the High Altar are buried other bishops, all those more ordinary ecclesiastics who, according to the young woman, have not, since their death, performed any miracles. And there is the burial-place of the Lords of Vence, and the vault where the relatives of Madame de Sévigny are interred. In fact, as our guide said, the church is one great sarcophagus.

"When I was a little girl," she continued, "my father, who was sacristan, took me down to see them all, these bishops and lords and ladies. There were coffins, coffins everywhere. Each corner was piled with them! I remember one old bishop whose coffin had crumbled away. He lay there in the rags of his robes *tout entier*. *Ma foi!* he was not handsome! We did not touch him. No doubt he is lying there still, waiting for the Judgment Day."

I shivered. "It was no sight for a child. Did it not frighten you?" I asked. The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Why should one be afraid?" said she. "They are dead, these old saints and sinners. If they were alive now it might be different. I have heard some strange stories told of these *messieurs là*."

After that the church seemed more uncanny than ever. The rain thundered on the roof, and poured from the eaves and gargoyles, while every step we took seemed to waken some ghostly echo. Even the walls and pillars concealed mysteries.

"They were plastered over," said the woman, "at the time of the Revolution. The pillars beneath are covered with statues, I have heard, old gods and goddesses belonging to the temple which stood here in ancient times."

"They ought to be uncovered."

"Yes," replied she. "But we want a new rector, who will spend some money on the church. He is too old, Monsieur le Curé; he is tired, finished. One might as well say we have no rector. The other day an American wanted to buy the sarcophagus of Saint Véran! Bon Dieu! I trembled for it! And the stalls, has Madame seen the stalls? They are of the same form as those in *Vesminstaire*. They are always trying to get them, les *étrangers*. One day they will disappear unless Monsieur le Recteur disappears first!"

The stalls, and the old oak *lutrin* which stands in the dark tribune, above the west end, are certainly fine, but the light was so imperfect that we could not fully appreciate them. And yet I would not have had it otherwise, for it was the day of days to see Vence. Everything carried one's thoughts back to the past. But from out the crowd of Lombards, Saracens, Huguenots, Lords, Saints and Bishops, whose ghosts haunt the place, emerges the figure of a little dwarfish man with a face like a monkey, a black skull-cap on his head, and a cross on his breast.

It is Antoine Godeau, the Poet Bishop of Vence, better known as the first member of the renowned French Academy.

He was born at Dreux, in Eure-et-Loir, in 1605. There, inspired by the sister of a poet friend, he wrote his first verses, love songs, and letters. It is a sad little story. Feeling his physical imperfections, he never dared to sign his passionate declarations of love, and the young lady married in due course. For three years Godeau left off writing to her; then, hearing that she was a widow, he began again, still under a feigned name. The lady responded, the correspondence grew warmer, till one day Godeau received a letter asking him to call.

Well, it was a fiasco! The girl, unable to appreciate the beautiful soul which lived in the ugly stunted form, showed her disgust

in her face. She did worse, she spread abroad the story, laughing at poor Godeau's presumption, even allowing his verses to be published. It was too much. The little man fled to Paris, and that was how the French Academy took its birth.

In those days, there used to meet, in Paris, at the house of Godeau's cousin, Conrart, a few young men of literary tastes. It was a very private little discussion society, at which they compared notes, read their latest poems, talked "familiarily, as they might have done at any ordinary visit, about all sorts of things."

It was not long before Antoine Godeau found his way into this society, of which he soon became one of the leaders. Together with his cousin, he was welcomed by the Princesse de Condé to the Hôtel Rambouillet, in the celebrated Salon Bleu d'Arthénice, where the literary members of the Court passed their evenings, and lived their intellectual lives. Here Godeau quickly found himself famous. No one laughed at his little figure. He was "Le Nain de la Princesse Julie"; everyone knew his verses by heart. He assisted in compiling *La Carte du Tendre*. He was Antoine Godeau, one of the great poets of the reign of Louis XIII. Richelieu heard of him from Boisrobert, one of the members of the little society of friends who met each week at Conrart's house.

"Would not these persons like to form

themselves into a body," he asked, "and meet regularly under public authority?"

Alas for the cosy, friendly meetings! When Richelieu made a suggestion it was a command. So, with much regret, the young men agreed, and, on the 10th of February, 1635, the king issued letters-patent, giving their society existence, under the name of L'Academie Française. Cardinal Richelieu was himself head and protector, the number of members was limited to forty, and the function of the new academy was to "work with all possible care and diligence to give settled rules to the French language, and to render it pure, eloquent, and capable of treating of the arts and sciences; in short, to make it the most perfect of modern languages."

For two years Parliament refused to recognise the new society. However, in 1637, they gave their consent, and the first name that was entered on the register was that of Antoine Godeau.

Meanwhile, however, a change had come over the young man. His writings, without losing any of their charm, had become more serious, and shortly after his appointment to the Academy he became a priest. It was about this time that he made his famous paraphrase of the Benedicite, which he dedicated to Richelieu.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," said the Cardinal, "vous m'avez donné Benedicite; je vous

donne Grâce (Grasse).” And Godeau accordingly became Bishop of Grasse and Vence, which Sees had lately been united to form one. Such a union was, however, so extremely unpopular, that the new bishop himself petitioned the Pope to make them once more independent.

It is difficult to see why Godeau abandoned the important town of Grasse, and went to bury himself at Vence. But this is what he did. Perhaps the weird melancholy of the old cathedral appealed to his poetic soul. Perhaps he felt that the people of Vence needed him: or it may be that he had in him something of the hermit, and craved after hardship and solitude. Or did he first visit Vence on a wet September afternoon? In any case, he seems to have loved his new home. He writes: “In marrying my diocese, I feel as if I had married a wife. My wife is poor, hard like the rocks, rough and melancholy. But I must needs love her since I have taken her, and indeed the husband himself has many more bad qualities than she.” It was a good spirit in which to begin his work.

He found the cathedral in a deplorable condition, the clock tower falling into ruin, the windows gone, the organ unusable. Even to-day people walk through the church on their way from the Place Godeau. At that time it had become almost a thoroughfare,

and in the ancient cemetery itself the women used to dry their linen and feed their sheep and cows.

But Godeau proved a good "husband" to the poor neglected town, and it soon began to wear a gayer aspect. He spent much time visiting the outlying parishes, allowing nothing to discourage him, neither the rudeness of the weather nor the people's manners. He remembered how they had been forsaken, and his heart being filled with pity, he soon came to love them the more for the trouble they gave him.

I first read of Bishop Godeau in a book I picked up in Provence. Since then I have found him mentioned by many authors, Honoré Bouche, Papon, above all, his biographer, Georges Doublet. And it is always the same story, a life given to a work which might well have been considered unworthy of so brilliant an intellect. The sight of this young poet, who had passed his early days as the spoiled darling of the most intellectual society in Europe, suddenly giving up all that made life pleasant and desirable, renouncing his ambition, his worldly hopes, his friends, and coming to this forsaken town, where even the priests had become so lax that Godeau found not a friend to whom he could open his heart, is one of the astounding miracles of the Church.

Sometimes, although he never allowed him-

self to repine, he would show in his verses that he still remembered the old days of the Hôtel Rambouillet: "My time would be perfect," he writes, "if a less space divided Rambouillet from the hills of Grasse!"

But that was before he came to Vence. There he found his true vocation. He was very poor, and even out of his poverty he had to relieve others who were poorer. But, as a friend said of him, "The rising and setting of the sun gave him a pleasure which everyone is not capable of feeling." And he himself writes:—

Que j'aime à voir le ciel que luit d'un feu si pur,  
Qui sans tache et sans ride étale son azur.

So the long solitary walks over the mountains, and down the valleys, were full of simple pleasures for the Bishop, who, after all, as a country-bred man, and a child of nature, must often have found the streets of Paris wearying to his soul. There are some of us who would not exchange the simple joys of the country even to be first Member of the French Academy and live in Paris!



## CHAPTER X

### CASTELLANE

IN the hall of the Hôtel Muraour we had noticed a bill about a motor omnibus, which carried the posts to the mountain villages and towns, as far as Castellane. It professed to start at eight o'clock in the morning, and one day when the bells had roused us early, we hastened down to the *Cours*, took our tickets, and, seating ourselves on a wall in the sunshine, waited for the conveyance.

It came in due course, rattling up the hill at a great pace, and as soon as all the best places had been filled with parcels and sacks, we crept into the interstices and settled down for a long drive. It is a glorious road. It begins climbing immediately, mounting the hillside till Grasse itself looks on a level with Cannes, and the country lies spread out, on the edge of the sea, like a map. Presently we pass the terrace where Napoleon breakfasted on that memorable day of which we have spoken, and still we climb and climb. Now we are on a mountain-shelf, desolate, grey, while above us can be seen the road,

twisting and turning in its efforts to mount still higher.

SAINT VALLIER.—In the little *place* there is a bust of the Emperor, on a Corinthian pillar, and the words 2 Mars 1815. As we drive up we find the whole male population turned out to welcome us. There are three soldiers, seven or eight farmers, a dozen nondescript youths, and in the midst the priest, a stout, good-humoured looking person, with a large St. Bernard dog. Just as we are beginning to wonder what we have done to deserve this honour, the conductor jumps down with a packet of journals, and the mystery is explained. It is the news they are waiting for. The papers are snatched, opened, devoured, and as, after the momentary pause, we continue our way, and look back, we see the little square full of excited readers, talking, gesticulating, shouting, quarrelling, in the usual French fashion; whilst the great dog and "Napoleon" gaze with calm indifference on the scene.

After Saint Vallier the route becomes still more amazing. We mount into the country of limestone, where only stunted oaks and lavender grow. Soon even the starved trees cease, and we find ourselves out on the slopes of Les Blanchâtres, grey phantom peaks, vestiges of what all the world must once have been. Yet even here I can still smell the lavender, and see the grey tufts peeping out

from the crannies. Through this primeval landscape the road winds its giddy way, now creeping out on to a shelf to round some projecting cliff, now burrowing into the darkness to cross a ravine, and always the perpendicular rock above, and the fathomless abyss below.

At the most awful spot, where the gulf is spanned by a bridge, reaching from wall to wall, we met a solitary motorist flying downward at breakneck speed. Then once more we were alone, till, on crossing the col, we came upon Escragnolles. The trees had climbed up on this side of the mountain, and, just below the village, had gathered, as if for company, into a timid little forest. Here and there they had been felled and barked, and lay about on the rocks, looking, from our side of the village, as though someone had spilt a box of matches. The peasants of Escragnolles are a curious race, a little colony of Genoese, who came and settled here more than six hundred years ago, and still preserve traces of their native language and many of their old Italian customs.

We had been noticing for some time that our chauffeur was driving in a more than usually reckless manner. His collar reached so high and his cap so low that, while he kept his seat, we could not see his face. But at the next stop, some village near the summit of the Col de Lans, we got out to stretch our





THE ROCK OF CASTELLANE

legs, and came face to face with him. He looked as if he had not been in bed for a month!

"Is the chauffeur ill?" I asked the conductor anxiously.

"Yes," said he. "He has been asleep most of the way. I do not know what is the matter with him. He says he cannot see the road. He must be giddy."

I suggested that my husband should drive, but of this they would not hear, and we had to go back into our seats, and trust to Sainte Barbe, or Saint Anthony, or whoever is the motorist's special patron in Basses Alpes. After this the road runs down hill all the way, and at every corner I gave myself up for lost, till suddenly, on rounding a shoulder, I saw something that made me forget my terror.

Far below lay a valley, with a river flowing through it, and rising from the midst of the fertile plain a colossal rock, like the donjon keep of some Cyclopean fortress. At its foot flowed the Verdon, protecting it from all approach, save where a single arch had been thrown across the stream. It was a great natural stronghold, built by the powers that formed the world itself as a refuge in time of peril for the people of the lonely valley.

All the way down we watched the great rock growing vaster and vaster, till, as we reached the bridge, it seemed to fill the whole valley and blot out the sky itself. I do not

think that in the whole world there can be anything more astonishing than the Rock of Castellane. No wonder that the old Gauls of the district adored it as a god, and on its summit offered sacrifices in its honour.

The motor drew up at the door of an old-fashioned inn, on the *place*, the Hôtel du Levant, and we were informed that we had two hours before us in which to eat and make ourselves acquainted with Castellane. But we had had enough of motoring for one day, so, in spite of having no luggage, we decided to stay the night.

Now landlords are not particularly fond of guests who arrive unaccompanied with luggage, and when I inquired for a room, the girl looked doubtful.

"I did not expect to stay," said I, "but your town looks so interesting that I want to photograph it and learn more about it. I can buy what I require for the night."

Instead of showing us upstairs, she went and fetched the landlord.

"You want a room?" he asked, looking keenly at our dusty figures.

"Yes," said I; "I want to stay the night. You see I am English" . . . I got no further.

"Oh, English!" said he, his face clearing.

"Tell him we will pay in advance," said my husband, who was not used to this way of being welcomed.

"No, no!" said the landlord obsequiously.

"I did not understand, that is all! As Monsieur is English it is, of course, quite natural that he should arrive thus." So, after we had sent a message to Grasse, we set out on a voyage of discovery.

In speaking of Castellane one must commence with the Rock, for the whole story of the town begins and ends there. In the earliest times the people did not live under its very shadow, as they do now. The tribe of Gauls who inhabited this upland valley of the Verdon were called Saliniens, from the two salt springs beside which their city stood, and which lay at the western extremity of the plain. As for the great Rock and the river Verdon, they were their divinities, and doubtless the divinities of many of the tribes in the vicinity. Indeed, it seems probable that the valley of Castellane was in those days a sacred spot, a place of pilgrimage, like Avebury, Stonehenge, Carnac, Delphi, where people came to offer sacrifices to the great spirits of the River and the Rock. I do not know whether the Saliniens were a race of priests, set apart for the carrying out of this cult, but it is certain that they were particularly virtuous people, pastoral in their pursuits, and patriarchal in their habits. They were strict teetotallers, no wine being permitted to either men or women. Children were entirely under the control of their parents, and remained so as long as their



elders lived. Some of their most stringent laws had to do with idleness, which was regarded as the worst of vices. If it was noticed that anyone was becoming at all stout, the authorities produced the Public Belt, the traditional standard of what the size of a man should be, and whatever the rank of the suspected person, he was measured. If he was found to exceed the given limits, he was severely beaten, his food restricted, and his work increased. These abstemious people only allowed themselves one meal a day, which they ate at sunset, seated on straw or on the grass. Their food consisted of milk and meat, particularly of pork—both fresh and salt. Diodorus Siculus says that they dined seated on the skins of dogs or wolves, near a fire, round which were pots full of flesh and spits charged with joints. Apart from this meal they had nothing except a small piece of dry bread and some fruit taken in the morning. According to Strabo, they slept on the ground on a bed of dry leaves or straw.

As to clothes, the laws were very strict, the men wearing a greatcoat called a Saga, and broad breeches reaching to the heels—the Bracate. Any luxury in dress was so strongly discouraged that there was a special law regulating the costume of girls, who were, moreover, only allowed to receive one hundred crowns as their marriage portion, lest

they should be tempted to spend too much on their trousseaux.

These Saliniens were an artistic race, with a talent for poetry, which found expression in rhythmical histories of all the chief events of their lives. And they were so handsome and tall, that when first they saw the Romans they burst into fits of laughter at their funny little figures.

I read all this in an old book lent me by the landlord, who, ever since he had discovered the reason of our extraordinary behaviour, had been most friendly. I do not think, judging by the meals he gave us, that he could have been of the old Salinien race. Certainly, had we remained long at the Hôtel du Levant, we should have been unable to bear the test of the Public Girdle!

All the afternoon we wandered about the neighbourhood, photographing the great Rock, which fascinates one more and more the longer one knows it. I believe I should come to worship it myself if I lived at Castellane. I certainly should have done so in the days of the Saracens.

They were at that time in possession of the south of France. The towns on the Riviera had been destroyed, and even this upland valley of the Verdon had not escaped. The Saliniens, for all their bravery, could no more defend themselves against these enemies than

against the little Romans they had so despised, and the town of Salinæ was simply wiped out.

Then it was that the people (those few of them who remained) cast themselves on the mercy of their ancient god, or goddess, as I think she must have been, since the Christian priests, in raising an altar to the new religion on the site of the old, dedicated it to Our Lady of the Rock. It was to this sanctuary that the remnants of the people climbed, by paths known only to themselves. But even here they would not long have escaped the terrible foe had it not been for the great leader who has, ever since, been looked upon by the people of Castellane as the real conqueror of the Saracens. Nobody knows his name, so we will call him the Chief. Suddenly he appeared in the midst of the frightened little band gathered on the great Rock. There he raised his standard, and built his fortress. There was only one possible way up to the Rock, and this he guarded so carefully that it was hopeless to think of attacking him. He had, too, some wonderful contrivance for storing water, a great fissure in the Rock built up into a huge cistern. And there was a covered way by which he and his men could creep down into the valley, and fall upon the enemy when they were unprepared.

One of his first cares was to build a chapel to Our Lady of the Rock. There he kept his

standard, and went to ask for assistance before sweeping down on his foes, and before the chapel door he held his rough court and dispensed justice.

As soon as he had driven the Saracens out of the valley itself, he began building fortresses on the surrounding heights to guard the approach to his domain. You see their ruins to-day—Taulanne, Demandolx, Ubraye, and others. Here he posted guards who, as soon as they saw signs of approaching danger, passed the signal along.

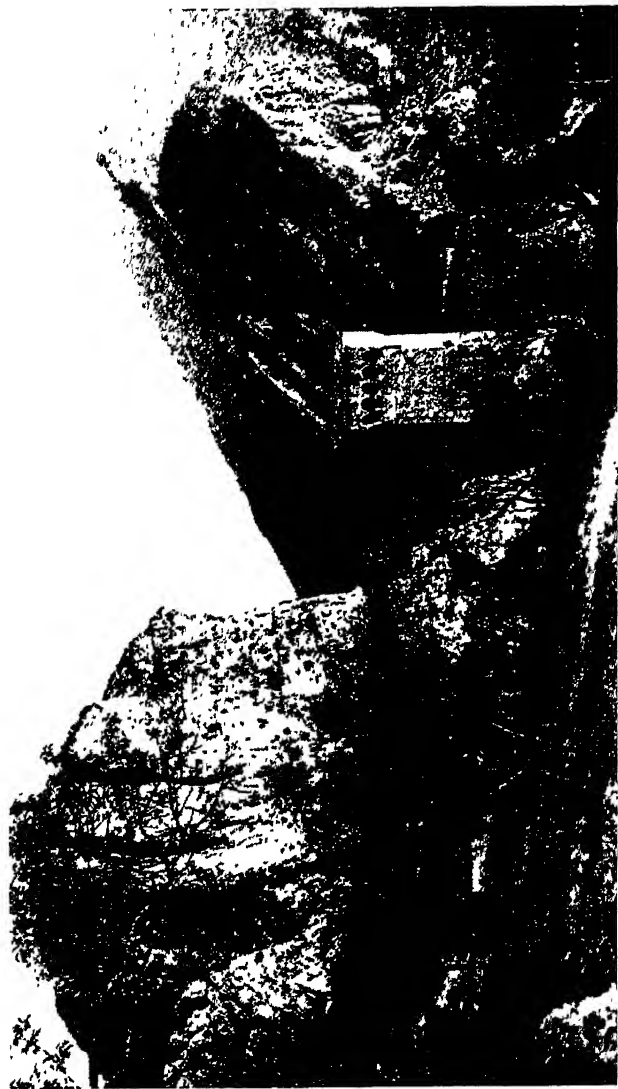
As to the Chief himself, in his fortress of Petra Castellana, he became more and more powerful, taking for his arms his own impregnable fortress on the Rock. As time went on, the fame of Castellane spread, and people from less secure towns and villages came to settle here, so that not only the top of the Rock was covered with dwellings, but also part of the steep approach. But still the Lord of Castellane had his dwelling on the summit, close by the Chapel of Notre Dame. That was the origin of the family of Castellane, and so great was the debt of gratitude which Provence owed to the Chief, that when the country became settled, the reigning baron was put in full possession of the estate, and given all the rights of a veritable king, owing homage only to the Emperor himself.

I have told the story of the birth of Castellane at some length, but it is very interesting

as showing how much the history of a race depends on the physical conditions of its country.

If the people of Castellane had remained living on their Rock they would have escaped other dangers than the Saracens. But the space soon became too narrow to contain them, and the houses gradually extended down into the plain, and the people, finding the suburb more convenient, abandoned the Rock and founded the present Castellane. This third town, however, remained under the shelter of the fortress, and was strongly fortified. Even to-day some of the walls and gates are to be seen. . . .

When it grew too dark to read, my husband went to find a barber and a tooth-brush, and a few other little things which even mad English travellers cannot wholly dispense with. The barber turned out to be the sacristan of all the churches in Castellane. His name, he told us proudly, was Audibert, which, in turn with Boniface, and an occasional Pierre, has always been the baptismal appellation of the Lords of Castellane. Indeed, I think it quite likely that some of the old Chief's blood may flow in the barber's veins, for he has the most astonishing devotion to the family, and would have talked on about it till midnight if we had waited. As it was, he promised to meet us next morning at the top of the Rock (which, by the bye, I find



THE REMAINS OF THE FORTIFICATIONS OF CASTELLANE



myself always spelling with a capital R) and show us the chapel.

When we woke next morning we found the valley filled with a thick white mist. But, even as we were drinking our coffee, the statue of Our Lady of the Rock shone through the clouds, and, by the time we were ready to start, the morning was radiant.

There is, at the end of the town, near where the ancient Augustine monastery used to stand, a steep path leading upward. That is the only route now to Petra Castellana, for the ancient covered road has disappeared. All the way up we kept passing Stations of the Cross, for the chapel on high is still a famous pilgrim resort, and in time of any trouble Notre Dame du Roc is visited and entreated even more promptly than was her pagan predecessor.

As we neared the summit we crossed a narrow neck of land, a kind of col or bridge, the only point by which the top of the Rock is connected with anything earthly. Here are the ruins of an ancient chapel to Saint André, and the remains of a monastery, and barracks for soldiers. Then the path winds up more steeply than before, rounding the face of the cliff so boldly that I dare not look down into the valley, but fix my eyes resolutely on the step before me! Even when we reach the summit the space is so small that one feels there ought to be a wall round



to prevent people falling off. I wonder how many wretched victims have been cast down into the Verdon that flows six hundred feet below ! It is quite possible that such may have been the special mode of sacrifice offered to the Rock and the River.

In the chapel itself is a statue of the Virgin brought (so said Jean Baptiste Audibert, whom we had found waiting for us) by the celebrated crusader, Pierre de Castellane, from the East. As a matter of fact, I believe it was sent from Malta by someone of the name of Guillabert in 1640. But it is none the less reckoned miraculous, and, as we examined the host of ex-voto tablets, Jean Baptiste, in order to convince us of the efficacy of the Saint, told us the histories of some of them. One struck me as very touching. It had been put there by a certain Marie Virier, who lived in the highest street of the town, in the quarter called Les Baous. Her husband was a keeper of mules, a trade much followed in Castellane. They had one child, Delphine Honorine Baptistine, who had fallen ill of typhoid fever, and seemed at the point of death. Everyone despaired save the mother.

“ Earthly help has failed,” said she ; “ we must appeal to Heaven.” Then, running to her cupboard, she drew out her gold marriage chain, the one treasure she possessed, and, holding it in her hand, hastened up the steep

path to the chapel. But, when she arrived panting, she found the door locked ! What should she do ? Suddenly her eyes fell on a little opening through which the statue could be seen. Mounting on a stone, she flung in her precious chain, crying, " Good Mother of the Rock, have pity on me ; heal my child ! "

Whoever the original Mother of the Rock may have been, she seems not to have lost her power, for when this poor mother of the valley reached home she found, oh, wonder of wonders ! her child smiling at her, the fever gone. As Jean Baptiste expressed it—" Pendant son absence, La Bonne Mère du Roc avait descendue de la guérir."

In the year 1835 the beloved statue was taken down to heal the stricken town of cholera ; and again, in 1870, because of an outbreak of smallpox ; and the sacristan told me that it was absolutely essential for every newly married couple to mount the Rock, on the day of their wedding, and visit *La Bonne Mère*, or they would have no luck in their future life. The wedding breakfast is never held until after the pilgrimage to Our Lady of the Rock has taken place.

For a long time we sat up there in the sunshine, listening to Jean, who rambled on about the Rock, the River, and the Family—the family of Castellane, of course. There was the Bridge, too—one of those old bridges so resented by the ancient god of the river,

and still looked upon as half sacred by the people of Castellane. As to the fortress on the Rock, it was kept up until the reign of Louis XI, when so many castles were destroyed. Now, there is scarcely a vestige of it left. But there is the chapel and the Rock, and, above all, the sacristan and his stories.

"Do you see that gate down there?" asked Jean, as we leaned over the low wall that bounded the precipice, and peered down into the square. "That is La Porte de l'Annonciade, the ancient gate to the town. Listen, I will tell you a history of that gate.

"It was the winter of 1586, when the Protestants were ravaging Provence. They had lately established themselves at Seyne, with their chiefs, Lesdiguières and Gouvernet, and the Lords of Mauvans, Antonine Richieu and his brother, Le Capitaine Paulon. Terrible stories were told of them. It was as if the days of the Saracens had returned; each one went in fear of his life. One day an old woman was out gathering wood on that hill over there—l'Escouloon, we call it. Suddenly, she saw something moving on the col, very far away. She strained her eyes, and saw that it was men—many men—creeping along the edge of the forest. Flinging down her wood, she ran toward the town, crying out her warning. Then the *tocsin* sounded, and men, women, and children set to work preparing for the siege they knew must come.

The gates were shut and barred, and great stones carried up to the walls, together with boiling oil and pitch. So when the enemy arrived they found all ready for them. Now they had heard from a traitor that La Porte de l'Annonciade was the one weak point in the defence, so they established themselves in front of it, and began the attack. But the men of Castellane had been too quick for them, for they had built up a wall behind the gate and filled the space between with stones. Again and again was it attacked, and each time the enemy was driven back. And all the while the men on the walls were shooting and casting down great stones, and the women kept the pitch and oil hot, and rained it upon the enemy. One of the girls, Judith Andran, whose name has remained a household word in Castellane, brought a pot of boiling pitch, and running out fearlessly on to the top of the gate, flung it over the Captain of the Petardeers, Jean Motte, who had all the trouble in the world to get free from *lou bujaïë*. As the song says :

'Une brave Judith  
S'armant de son courage  
Par sa valeur défit  
L'ennemi plein de rage ;  
Jean Mothe est écrasé  
Sous la poix embrasée  
D'une lourde machine.  
Alors levant la voix  
Ils disent a la fois :  
Le Ciel nous extermine ! "

"What song?" I enquired.

"The song we sing at the procession on the 31st of January, the day of the siege of Castellane."

"Were there many killed?"

"Heretics," answered the sacristan, with grim satisfaction. "Of our people not one. You may imagine if there was joy in the town when they saw the enemy making off by the way they had come, and not a single man of Castellane the worse."

It appears that every year there is held this thanksgiving procession before the old Porte de l'Annonciade, when the popular rhymed version of the story is sung, and thanks rendered to Notre Dame du Roc for the great deliverance she is believed to have wrought for the little town over which she watches.

One might write a whole book about Castellane and the great lords who founded and ruled it. There was Pierre de Castellane, who, as the sacristan said, had inherited his ancestors' dislike of the Saracens, and so went to the Crusades for the pleasure of fighting the infidels in their own country. And there was Boniface de Castellane, who refused to do homage to Alphonse, Count of Provence, son of the King of Aragon. And there was the other Boniface who had to go down on his knees to Raymond Béranger and acknowledge that he held his Rock, his town, his castle, his fourteen other fortresses, and the

rest of his possessions as vassal of the Count of Provence. After Raymond's death he rebelled, but was caught, tried, and beheaded, and that was the end of Castellane as an independent State.

From our point of vantage we could see the route by which Napoleon travelled on his way back from Elba. It appeared that Jean Baptiste knew all about that journey, his grandfather having provided the ex-Emperor with four fresh mules to enable him to cross the mountains to Digne. One of the beasts was laden with a case of gold coins, which Napoleon, being all but penniless, had borrowed from the prefect.

"As my grandfather was following up the steep track," said Jean Baptiste, "he saw the mule stumble, and next moment the gold was pouring in a stream down the path. You can imagine the Emperor! They collected what they could, but they were pressed for time, and many of the pieces had rolled out of sight. Even to-day the children will go hunting, and turning over the stones, to find *Bonaparte's gold*."

It seemed very dark below in the town. We followed the sacristan through the gate, beneath the clock tower, into the Ghetto, a black, forbidding maze of evil-smelling dens, where, in old times, the Jews were herded. They were forbidden to hold any communication with the Christians, under threats of

severe punishment, and yet, as the sacristan said, they managed to find their way into every household, lending money on usury, and making themselves necessary in a thousand ways. They were also the physicians and surgeons of Castellane, and grew so rich and powerful that, in the reign of Louis XII, they had to be dealt with summarily or they would have ousted the Christian population. So they were ordered to receive baptism, or go into exile. Many of them were baptized in the old font of the Church of Saint Victor, which, until 1875, was the parish church.

The sacristan had been called away by his duties as a barber, and had left us in charge of a toothless old woman of about ninety, who hobbled round the church and told us about the bodies which were buried in the vaults beneath. She mumbled on about everything, showing us a gate leading—so she said—by a subterranean passage to the river. But chiefly she was interested in the vaults and their crowded condition. I think that, having so nearly finished her own earthly course, it gave her a grim satisfaction to let her mind dwell on the many who had had to pass the gate of death before her. It made her feel less lonely.

“Do you have many English here?” I asked.

“Yes, yes!” said she. “There are many English come to Castellane. There was King

Edward—I saw him; and the Prince of Monaco—he comes often; and I'll be bound, monsieur le sacristan told you about Napoleon Bonaparte coming here. But they all pass away. It is only the dead who remain!"

When our chauffeur arrived at lunch-time, we found him much better for his night's rest, and about two o'clock we set off for our wild return journey across the desolate mountains. For a long time after the town had sunk out of sight, we could see the great Rock, crowned with its chapel and statue of Notre Dame. Then we turned a corner, and it, too, vanished.

As we passed the lane leading to Peyroules, we thought of Isarn, the old Abbot of Saint Victor of Marseilles, and how he cured the ants of Peyroules of their bad habit of destroying the corn. The only other instance I ever heard of ants in connection with corn is contained in the well-known nursery rhyme. Perhaps that little black ant who found the large grain of corn came from Peyroules. Isarn himself has evidently replaced some ancient god of the crops, for his oratory near Castellane is visited, in September, by pilgrims who come to ask a blessing on the fruits of the earth, and protection from thunderstorms.

Just beyond Seranon we came upon a whole family waiting, with their luggage, by the side of the road, for the coming of the autobus. There were *Maman*, three healthy,



riotous young urchins, and a stout black-haired nurse. They had an enormous amount of luggage, which was piled upon the roof by the conductor and chauffeur, so that when running down hill we swayed more horribly than ever. The family had been spending the summer in a farm among the mountains, and were now on their way to Cannes, *en route* for Toulon. *Maman* was desperately afraid of losing the train, and urged the chauffeur to put on speed, till really, what with the swaying, the rushing, the noise of the children, the rattling of the windows, I felt as if I should have gone crazy. Presently, I do not quite know where, we picked up three rosy-cheeked girls, who were going down to Cannes, as servants, for the season. They, too, had bundles, and hat-boxes, and packages of all kinds; and a little farther on we came across a fat huntsman, with his dog, so that for the latter half of the way we were decidedly *archicomblé*! At each halt the three girls pushed their way out, and rushed round the village, saying goodbye to their friends, who came crowding back with them, bringing fresh parcels to be taken to Cannes.

The girls were full of their prospects.

"She promised me fifty francs a month, if I would come back to her this winter," said one young woman, who had returned accompanied by an old white-capped peasant—her *marraine*, it appeared.

"It shows what she thinks of you!" said the godmother proudly.

"I could have had fifty also," said one of the other girls, "even more, if I had been willing to engage myself with the English. But I had enough of them last season. They pay, yes, but the work, *mon Dieu*!"

"A voiture, mes belles, s'il vous plait!" cries the conductor, but they take no heed.

"That is only if you are a cook," replied the first girl. "I would not live as cook with the English, if they paid me in diamonds! Their eating is never finished. I do not say there are many courses; they are as savages with regard to their food; soup, fish, a joint, *voilà tout*! *Mais Seigneur Dieu*! it continues all day. As a *femme de chambre*——"

"A voiture! A voiture!" repeated the conductor still louder.

"Adieu, Annette!" cries the godmother.

"Adieu!" cries everyone. "A l'année prochaine! Bon voyage!"

Then follow kisses, embracings, facetious smackings of lips on the part of the chauffeur and conductor, and lo, we are off once more.

When it began to grow dusk the great head lamps were lighted, and it was rather awe-inspiring when, on turning a corner, one saw them shining out into space, and knew that if, in his headlong career, the chauffeur made the error of a couple of inches, we should fall eight hundred feet or so before alighting.

The youngest boy had gone to sleep on his mother's lap, and the others were trying to persuade the chauffeur to let them drive! I think even the girls felt uneasy, as we swung round the hairpin turns, for once or twice I heard a muttered "*Jésu, mon Dieu!*" . . .

Well, we got down somehow. Suddenly, on turning the worst corner of all, we saw far, far below, as though at the bottom of a great gulf, the lights of Grasse, and after a few more breathless moments, were set down, safe and sound, at the good old Hôtel Muraour de la Poste.

## CHAPTER XI

### I. CANNES

CANNES is said to take its name from the canes or bamboos which grow so plentifully in the neighbourhood and are used for supporting vines. The town itself is not interesting to the antiquarian, as it may be said to have existed only since the days of Lord Brougham, who, as is well known, was stopped here on his way to Genoa, on account of the cholera which had broken out in Italy, and had to wait for a special permit from Paris before proceeding on his journey. He had been searching for a winter home for his invalid daughter, and the climate of Cannes struck him as so exceptional, even for the balmy shores of the Mediterranean, that during his forced delay, he bought some ground and gave orders for a house to be begun. As he grew to know the place better, he liked it the more, and finally became the good genius of Cannes. It was he who induced Louis Phillippe to give the fishermen of Cannes a harbour; it was his friends who came and built its beautiful villas, and

planted its exquisite gardens. So that Cannes has become the winter paradise of the rich.

It was to Cannes that, in 1869, the two elder daughters of Queen Victoria repaired with their children. Woolfield, in his little book, has told how the Royal sisters would go on wet afternoons and play upon the organ at Christ Church. And the Emperor William, too, was a friend of Cannes, and so was Prince Albert of Prussia, who requested that he might always be informed when the choir intended to sing "The Son of God goes forth to War," in order that he might be present!

But there is another Cannes, lying on Mont Chevalier, which is more attractive to a poor wanderer in search of the picturesque.

On the height to the west of the town we may still find the ancient square clock tower, and the donjon keep. There, too, is *la Place de la Castre* (or *castrum*), on which is the church of Notre Dame d'Espérance and the twelfth-century chapel of Saint Anne. And on the way down we may notice arches and ancient gables recalling the days when all this region belonged to the Abbots of Lérins, and provided food and wine for the many monks who dwelt on the Island.

## 2. LES ILES DE LÉRINS

Come, let us go to these islands. There is no steamer running as there would be in winter. No matter, it will be far more

delightful to hire a boat. So we walk out to La Croisette, and there find an old fisherman who offers, for ten francs, to take us sailing anywhere we like to go, provided we are back before sunset.

The *Saint Paul* is large and heavy, with a great white flapping sail and a pair of enormous oars, at which the old man lazily pulls, for there is scarcely a breath of wind. And so, half sailing, half rowing, we make our leisurely way over the transparent blue waters, toward the ancient sanctuary of the Ligurian god Léro.

I think it is Lenthéric who has said that, as long as one keeps to the land, one cannot become fully acquainted with the beauties of this coast of the Riviera. He is right. It is only when one finds oneself alone on the blue water that the peace and beauty of this land of eternal summer settles down upon one. The sea is so still and clear that we can look right down and see the red mullet swimming about among the weeds, and watch the shadow of our white sail flapping on the smooth, clean, sandy bottom. It is not very deep, this channel which divides the islands from the mainland. Indeed, geologically speaking, it is not so long ago since these rocky fragments, Sainte Marguerite and Saint Honorat, formed the extremity of the peninsula of La Croisette. . . .

As we drift farther and farther from the

shore the capes and headlands come peeping out from behind one another, Cap d'Antibes closing in the Golfe de Juan to the east, and to the west, Pointe de l'Aiguille, Pointe de l'Esquillon, and Cap Roux made sacred by the hermitage of that great Provençal, Honorat. Northward, the ground rises higher and higher, till Cannes, with its white palaces and hotels, looks like some toy village crouching on the border of the sea. First come the hills, with the villas and gardens, then, farther back, the wooded slopes round Grasse and Vence, and, far, far away, the faint luminous mountains, scarcely distinguishable from the white clouds hovering above them. And all around us on every side is the sea, blue, immense, a floor of living sapphire. As we passed Sainte Marguerite we drifted into a little breeze, so that the sail stirred and began stretching itself lazily. "It will not last," said the boatman, "but we may as well take advantage of it," and he shipped his oars and came aft. He was a little dark old man, rather like a monkey, probably a descendant of the ancient Ligurians, the earliest inhabitants of these shores of whom we know anything.

But he knew nothing about his tribal god or chief, Léro.

"Why are these islands called the Lérins?" I asked.

"It is because the monks used to make a

liqueur called Lérina," said he. "People liked the liqueur, so they named the islands after it."

"And why was the liqueur called Lérina?"

"Because it was its name to be sure! Why am I called André Mouan and my boat the *Saint Paul*? Because they are our names. The liqueur had to have a name or you could not have called for it." Well, and I suppose it was as good a reason as any other, for we really know nothing about the islands until the coming of Saint Honorat, concerning whom André had more than one curious legend to relate. For instance—

"In the saint's days there was one island," said he. "That is how Honorat found it when he came here from Cap Roux. He was a monk, and liked quiet places, and especially he wanted to get away from the women. But that is the hardest of all things to do. He had not been here more than a month or two before his sister Marguerite followed him and built a nunnery on the north side of the island. She was a great *bavarde* was Marguerite, and every day she would meet Honorat and talk and talk till he got quite dazed and used to forget his prayers. I suppose he ought to have known better, but there is no shaking a woman off when she wants a gossip. One morning when Honorat started out to meet his sister as usual, he found that, during the night, her part of the island had



been broken off from his, and that if he wanted to see her now he would have to take a boat. That is how the islands became separated. As to Marguerite, she could not go to see her brother because women were not allowed in that monastery, as you will find when you go there, and after what had happened Saint Honorat was afraid to go and see her. He promised, however, to pay her a visit whenever the cherry tree which grew in her garden came into flower.

"But that will only be once a year," said Marguerite, and she wept, while Saint Honorat, repeating what he had said, sailed away. But a month later he received a message from his sister saying that, though it was not the proper season, the cherry tree was in bud, and, of course, he had to go and see it. Every month it took to flowering, and, more wonderful still, when the day came for the saint to pay his visit, the water became solid, so that he could walk over dry shod, without the trouble of taking a boat."

"I wonder what Sainte Marguerite that was?" said I.

"Why, the sister of Saint Honorat," answered the old man testily. "I have just been telling you so, haven't I?"

We had been slowly making our way along the coast of the island, and now began rounding the low rocks which stretch out like fingers from the south-western extremity. We

had lost the breeze, and the water around us lay once more smooth as glass. André Mouan put down his pipe and returned once more to his oars, while I sat thinking of Sainte Marguerite, and wondering how her story had become connected with that of Saint Honorat. In my mind I ran through the legend of the Saint of Antioch, pictured her found by Olibrius, as she was tending the sheep of her fostermother, heard her declare herself a Christian, saw her tortured. . . . I had reached this point when I was recalled to myself by the boatman.

"There's the Dragon," said he, pointing to a low-lying rock on the south-western side of the island.

"The dragon killed by Sainte Marguerite?" I asked eagerly.

"No," he answered, shaking his head regretfully. "It's called the Dragon because a dragoon<sup>1</sup> killed himself by jumping off it into the sea."

But to me it will always be the "Devil, who had taken on him the shape of a huge dragon and threatened Marguerite to the end that she should consent to that which Olibrius said, adore the idols." And now we were nearing Ile Saint Honorat, *Lérina*, *l'Aigrette de la Mer*, as the boatman called it. The water looked so smooth and solid that it seemed as if we, also, might have walked on it. As we entered the little harbour we thought of

<sup>1</sup> Fr. *dragon*.

the Saint's arrival, more than fifteen hundred years ago—his real arrival, with his old friend and teacher, the monk Caprais.

Honorat was one of the chief personalities of the fifth century. In some ways he compares with our own Saint Iltud, being a great educationalist and trainer of saintly churchmen. Almost all the Provençal bishops and writers of those days came under the influence of Honorat or one of his successors. It is not really known with certainty where the Saint was born. Some say he was a Spaniard. His history begins with his conversion to Christianity, which took place when he was still a boy. His father, a gay, broad-minded noble, seems to have put no difficulties in the way of his son's change of religion, till he expressed a wish to leave the world and become a monk. Then, indeed, he tried everything to dissuade him, finally charging his elder son Vénance to take the boy out into society, and make him thoroughly acquainted with all the delights he wished to abandon. But the only result of this was that Vénance himself became converted, and the father dying about this time, the young men, after selling all their possessions, set off to visit those Fathers of the Desert, who had, by their austere virtues, made themselves so celebrated in the East.

Arrived in Greece, Vénance died, and Honorat, abandoning the idea of remaining longer

in Eastern Europe, returned to Provence, bringing with him the body of his brother. It is not known where Vénance was buried, perhaps in Italy, possibly at Fréjus, where Honorat stayed for a time before removing to his cave on Cap Roux. The life of this young Provençal, like that of so many early Christian converts, was one continuous search after solitude. Even La Sainte Baume, as the oratory on Cap Roux is still called, failed to satisfy him. From the cliff, he had seen, lying far away in the blue, the island fastness of *Lérina*. There he would be indeed alone—free to open his soul to those holy influences he felt around him, and to converse with God and Nature. Legend tells us how he found the island covered with ruins of pagan buildings, overgrown with brambles, and so infested with all kinds of reptiles, that, for a long time, no one had dared to visit it. There is an old life of Saint Honorat which tells of the cleansing of the island: “The Saint, on his arrival, seeing the serpents hastening toward him, flung himself on his face, and begged the Lord to exterminate the beasts, and immediately they all expired. Then, as their bodies began to poison the air, the Saint climbed up into a palm tree, raised his hands toward Heaven, and prayed fervently to God who had called him to inhabit this desert. And the sea arose, so that the waves overflowed the whole surface of the island, and as they

retired, took with them the bodies of the reptiles."

In the chapter house of the monastery there is a curious old fresco, representing this miracle of the serpents, with a picture of the palm tree, and for many years the monastery celebrated the event by bearing as its arms two palms entwined with a serpent, surrounding a mitre and cross. But the most striking relic of all is the great palm growing in the monastery garden, which, or so we were assured by André Mouan, was the very tree into which Saint Honorat climbed! The story has many points of interest. If for serpents we read pagans, it gives us a different idea of the reason for Honorat coming to settle on Lérina. He may have been a missionary who devoted himself to the conversion of this nest of idolatry. There is an old chapel on the island, dedicated to the Trinity, which is believed, even by the monks themselves, to have been once a pagan temple. And this story of the flood! Is it a poetical way of telling us of a great inundation, which drowned some of the most hopeless and virulent pagans, and left the island purified of all defilement, for the monastery which was to arise? For it was not long that Honorat lived alone on Lérina. The news of his miracles and holiness spread far and wide, and men, yearning for a religious life, came and begged permission to join him. The

community which resulted was rather a curious one. At different points, as far from each other as possible, were built seven chapels, and around these chapels were grouped the cells of the monks. Not far from the port was the great chapel, and the monastery proper, where dwelt the younger and less experienced brothers. Here, on Sundays, the whole community gathered to hear Mass and dine in common.

When it came to building this monastery, there was a difficulty about water, and the same history of which I have spoken tells us of the digging of the great well.

“Pressed by thirst the disciples of the Saint cast themselves at his feet, beseeching him to obtain, from God, the water which nature had refused to bestow on the island.

“‘Go, my brothers,’ said he, ‘go and dig boldly in the centre of the island between the two palm trees. God, who has created all springs of water, is powerful enough to give you whatever you ask in faith.’

“So they set to work and dug down to the rock, but without finding a drop of water, or even a trace of moisture. Discouraged, they returned to Honorat, and told him of the failure of their efforts. Then the Saint bade them attack the living rock itself, and put their trust in the Lord. And the disciples obeyed their Father, and burrowed to a depth of half the height of a man, but without

result. So, throwing aside their tools, they came and proposed to the Saint that they should make an attempt at another point of the island. But Honorat, who only felt his courage redoubled at the failure, went back with them to the place he had indicated, and, descending into the hole made by his disciples, called upon the Lord, and struck the rock three times in the name of the Holy Trinity, when immediately the waters burst forth abundantly." Even to-day the well of Saint Honorat still furnishes most of the water for the island.

But it was not by his miracles alone that Honorat made his reputation as one of the great saints of Christendom. He had a strong personal charm and beauty of character, the remembrance of which has survived the many centuries that have followed his death. For years he remained at Lérina, training his monks in holiness, showing them by his example what a Christian life should be. When at last he was called away to Arles, to succeed Patroclus as Bishop of that city, all the country grieved.

"Good Father," they cried, "do not forget us. Good Father, continue to pray for your sons in Jesus Christ. O God, protect our tender Father!"

Honorat himself could not speak for emotion, but, raising his weeping eyes to Heaven, he, for the last time, blessed his sorrowful

community, and went sadly down to the boat which was to bear him away to his new family.

And so the great founder passed out of the life of the monastery he created, and we are left, in the little harbour, thinking about him, while André Mouan lets fall his sail and fastens his boat to a stake.

Immediately on landing we found ourselves in front of an archway decorated with statues of some of the saints who have made this island famous. It gives entrance to an avenue of ancient cypress trees, leading straight across the island to the farther shore. Half way down the sombre alley is an opening to the left, a garden, flowers, sunshine, snowy buildings, the entrance to the monastery. After the depression caused by the passage through the gloomy avenue, it is like a glimpse of Heaven, and I have little doubt that the monks, who planned this symbolical approach had in their minds the idea of suggesting the tranquillity of the religious life, rendered all the more striking by the difficulties attendant upon the entrance to the *Way*. I had gathered from what the boatman had said that I should not be allowed to enter the monastery, but I went with my husband as far as the gate, and rang the bell. There was a pause, then the shutter opened and a young face peered through the grille.

“ Can one see the monastery ? ” I asked.



“Oui, Monsieur!” said the monk, looking right through me at my husband, and proceeding to unlock the door. I caught one glimpse of a snowy archway crowned with five black marble statues, of courtyards full of palms and flowers, then the door closed, and I was left to spend half an hour in the comfortless guestroom, meditating on my original sin in being born a woman. I am afraid my reflections did not profit me much. It was most irritating not to see the old cloister, and the chapter house with its painting of the cleansing of the island. My fingers itched to pull the bell again. But it would have been quite useless. So, turning away, I strolled down past a row of little cells, built against the outer wall, to the shore, and there found myself in a temple where women are just as welcome as men, a building roofed with the great dome of Heaven, floored with sapphire, emerald, and amethyst, with pillars of living trees and lighted by the sun itself. There was no lack of pictures either. Every turn brought some fresh wonder to view. Moreover, *here* I was looking on the very scenes which had greeted Honorat at his coming.

I had already recovered my temper when I came face to face with the Château Fort, rising gigantic from the smooth surface of the sea. There is no need to describe the old fortress of the monks of Lérina. Even women

are permitted to visit it! On its narrow neck of land it stands out golden and splendid against the blue of the Mediterranean. As I was looking up at the empty sockets of the windows, I was joined by André Mouan, who opined that I was waiting for Monsieur and suggested showing me the *Château*, of which he had obtained the key. So we crossed what had once been the drawbridge, and entered the strange old building raised in the eleventh century by Abbot Adelbert as a refuge for the monks in time of danger. They had had a stirring history since the days of Saint Honorat. There was the murder of Aygulf and his followers by some mutinous monks, who objected to the strict Benedictine rule the new Abbot had introduced. And there were the calamitous years of the Visigoth invasion, when Ausile suffered for the faith. And there were always pirates ready to pillage the rich monastery and murder the helpless monks. The most fearful massacre occurred when the Saracens were ravaging the south of Europe.

The monastery of Lérina was governed just then by a saintly Abbot named Porcaire. He had heard how the infidels had destroyed Eusébie and her nuns at Marseilles, and were pillaging every monastery and church along the coast. An angel had appeared to warn him that Lérina was not to escape, and had even told him the day and the hour when the

Saracens might be expected. There were a large number of monks on the island, who had fled thither for refuge from many little monasteries in the neighbourhood. Assembling them together, the Abbot told them of his vision, and of the fate which lay before them if they remained, and offered them the opportunity of going away to Italy, where they would find safety. The monks inquired what Porcaire himself intended to do, and, hearing that he had determined to abide at his post, they, with one voice, declared their intention of remaining with him. There were a few young novices and pupils, in all some fifty, whom they sent away, fearing they might be prevailed upon to renounce their faith. The rest prepared for what was to come.

When, a week later, the Saracens disembarked in the little port, and made their way up the cypress avenue, they found the gates of the monastery wide open. Astonished, they fell back, and there was a moment's pause. Then came the sound of singing, and presently from the chapel issued a procession, the old Abbot bearing the cross, followed by five hundred and five monks, all robed in white, like victims ready for sacrifice. The followers of the Prophet tried by every means in their power to shake the faith of the Christians, torturing them cruelly to make them confess where they had hidden

the treasure of the monastery, but all in vain. So they killed them without mercy. Four young monks they spared to sell as slaves, and two, having lost their courage, stole away to hide themselves among the rocks in a cave still known as Baoumo de l'Abbat, or the Abbot's Grotto. One, however, as he heard the cries of his brethren, repented, and running back, died among them; the other lived to be Abbot of Lérina. As for Porcaire and his brave five hundred, they were butchered like sheep, the greater number falling in the old cloister, whither they had retired, and the rest around the Abbot, who fell on the spot where to-day stands the tenth-century chapel, called after him, Saint Porcaire.

Having finished their bloody work, the Saracens retired, taking with them the four monks. The ships put in at Agay, and as soon as it was night, and everyone was sleeping, the four young Christians managed to steal away, and, finding a boat, returned to the island with the intention of burying their dead comrades. They found them heaped one upon another, blocking the doors and passages, lying just as death had left them, and the sight so moved them with grief and horror that they could not restrain themselves but wept aloud. In his cave among the rocks the escaped monk heard them, and, creeping out, joined and helped

them in their pious work. All night they laboured, and all next day, and all night again. And when the last body had been laid to rest, they started off in their fishing boat for Italy, to bring the Pope word of the disaster which had befallen the monastery. So the fortress of Adelbert was very much of a necessity to the monastery of Lérina.

I had already found my way all over it, and was sitting in a ruined window listening to the lapping of the waves below, and thinking of that actress, Mademoiselle de Roquefort, who once made the fortress her home, when my husband joined me. He had much to tell of the chapels, and refectories, and cloisters. He described, too, the great library, and told me about a certain monk called Raymond Féraud, who, in the old palmy days, had been the librarian.

A strange character, this Raymond Féraud, poet even more than monk. Nostradamus, in his *History of Provence*, tells us that he was a "good monk, singular and perfect in all sciences and languages, who wrote divinely well in all manner of letters, and was, as to painting and illumination, sovereign and exquisite."

He painted a magnificent Book of Hours, which he gave to Yolande, the mother of King René, who was so pleased with it, and with the monk himself, that she and her husband, Louis II, kept him near them, and

could not live without him. He was known as Le Moine des Iles d'Or, because every spring and autumn he would leave the court and go with a brother monk to the islands off Hyères, where he spent his time listening to the birds and studying their bright plumage, watching the ways of the wild animals, borrowing colours from the sunsets, the flowers, and the sea, and returning at the end of a few days laden with sketches and poems.

Under the pine trees on the northern shore of Ile Saint Honorat is a restaurant, an old dilapidated house, with a forest of tables and benches set out in front. I suppose in the winter and spring there are many excursionists to the island. In autumn it is quite solitary, and we lunched alone save for two dogs, and a flock of chickens who perched on the surrounding tables and scrambled for the food we threw them. There was no sound save the gentle ripple of the sea, and the whispering of the pine trees.

We were waited on by a most extraordinary girl, with bleached yellow hair and an ecclesiastical-looking face that made us wonder whether she was really a woman, or the phantom of one of the murdered Abbots of Lérina. The food she brought us helped the delusion, for the bread might very well have been baked in the days of Saint Honorat, and as to the sausage—it was as prehistoric as Léro himself. We gave it to the chickens in return

for some excellent eggs they had laid, and they enjoyed it mightily. As to the girl, for a long time I suspected her of having no tongue, for she never spoke, or even glanced in our direction. As she brought the coffee, however, she caught one of the dogs finishing a leather cutlet to which my teeth had been unequal.

"Va donc," she screamed, dropping the tray on to the table and catching up the camera-stand which lay handy. "Oh mendiant! Oh forçat! Arrête, enfant du Diable! Oh Bonne Mère des Anges, regardez moi ce brigand!" and a great deal more to the same effect. The dog ran off with his tail between his legs, followed by the whole colony of chickens, and the girl waving the three sticks of the camera. I do not know whether she caught him. She came back after a while to return the stand, her face as vampire white as ever, and her bleached hair ruffled, but, under the influence of a glass of her own blood-curdling wine, thawed sufficiently to tell me about the monks. It appears that there are thirty-five of them, Cistercians of the congregation of Sénanque. With the exception of *Le Père Econome*, no one of them ever crosses to the mainland. They live on vegetables and eggs, and pray for the souls of the dead and of the living.

"Their life is one prayer," said the girl, "from night to morning, and from morning

to night. *Ma foi!* it must be very dull to be a monk!"

On re-embarking, we found a pleasant breeze, and André Mouan suggested sailing round the island before proceeding to Ile Sainte Marguerite. It was thus we saw the little rocky islet of Saint Ferréol, memorable as having been for some years the sepulchre of the violinist Paganini. It is a curious story, and not very generally known, so I think I may repeat it.

We all remember Heine's description of the great Italian player, who was said to have sold himself to the Devil: "His long black hair fell in neglected curls on his shoulders, and formed a dark frame round the pale cadaverous face, on which sorrow, genius, and hell had engraved their indestructible lines."

Well, this "man planet about which the universe moved with measured solemnity" was on his way home to Genoa accompanied by his son, the only person who was able to hear what he said, so feeble was his voice. The ship touched at Nice where cholera was raging, and there Paganini died on 27th May, 1840. Determined to bury him in his native land, the son put the coffin on board ship, and set out for Italy. But the Genoese clergy, in view of the well-known compact with Satan, refused to give the musician burial. Once more the son set forth with



his uncanny companion. At Marseilles he was refused entrance on account of the plague from which his father had died, and it was the same at Cannes. So for a while he remained at sea, till at last one day he happened to notice the little deserted island of Saint Ferréol rising from the midst of the waves. Surely no one could grudge him this spot. So he landed with the coffin, and, assisted by a sailor, made a shallow grave in the middle of the island, where he laid the dead Paganini. Five years later, having obtained permission from the municipality of Genoa, he went to Saint Ferréol with two friends, took up the coffin, and returned with it to Italy.

The day was beginning to ripen when, after coasting along the eastern shore of Sainte Marguerite, we rounded La Pointe de la Convention and came, once more, in view of the full glory of the western sky. A strong bold sun was shining, and the castle of Richelieu glowed like the brazen tower of Danaë. We had spent so long with Sainte Honorat that we had little time to visit his sister. But we mounted the rocky path to the fortress, and asked to see the prison of the Masque de Fer. I suppose everyone who visits Cannes does the same.

We found the custodian's daughter playing croquet with some friends on a cinder court, and as her father was engaged just then, and

we were in a hurry, she sent her little brother to show us the room. He was a tiny boy, not much bigger than the keys he carried, but his pride was so great at being entrusted with such a mission, that on the way to the dungeon he appeared to grow, till, by the time he reached the heavy oak door, he seemed to have attained almost the proportions, and more than the dignity, of a real jailer.

"Shall I help you?" said I, noticing his little hands struggling with the huge key.

He looked up at me with his face red and crestfallen. "There must be something wrong with the lock," he replied. "It usually gives no trouble. Even my sister can open it."

We stayed some time in the large, dismal chamber, while the little fellow rambled on, in a sing-song voice, about the mysterious prisoner, who, for seventeen years, made this room his dwelling-place.

Who was he? No one will ever know. After reading all that has been said by historians, old and new, one is tempted to come back to the romantic hypothesis that this man was indeed of royal race, some rival of Louis XIV, possibly the real heir to the throne. Voltaire alludes to him as *l'inconnu*. But then Voltaire did not dare to publish all he knew. There is said to be in Paris, in a certain house on the Quai d'Orsay, an old trunk, full of papers by the great writer concerning the masked prisoner. If the time

ever comes that these are published, one of the great popular mysteries of the world will be elucidated.

As I looked up at the window, with its triple grille, I wondered how the silver plate of which Voltaire makes mention could have been thrown out. You remember that a fisherman found one lying on the rocks, with the name of the prisoner scratched upon it! But when I asked the little boy he said that it was dropped down the drain which opens from the room.

Papon gives an account of his visit to the prison in 1778, and, after describing it exactly as one sees it to-day, says that he found in the citadel an officer of seventy-nine years, who told him that his father had often spoken of a certain friar, who one day saw something white floating in the sea under the window of the prison, and took it to the governor. It was a very fine linen shirt, belonging to the captive, who, in spite of the severity of his confinement, was treated with the greatest consideration and respect, and had everything of the best. The shirt was covered with writing. After reading some lines the governor asked the friar if he knew what was written, and, although he protested that he did not, he was found two days after dead in his bed.

But perhaps the most curious story connected with the Man of the Iron Mask, has to do with a certain child born in the castle,

son of a woman named Bompart. Immediately after his birth the baby was sent away to Corsica, and given into the charge of a person of quality, with the recommendation that he was to be carefully brought up as he came of *buona parte*. As the child bore no name he was called Buonaparte, and was the ancestor of Napoleon I. The legend, of course, asserts that the boy was the son of the Masque de Fer.

I was sitting in the chair used for so many years by this strange enigma, when the custodian entered. "Well," said he, "has the little one shown you everything? There is not much to see. Yet what a story!"

"Who do you think he was?" I asked. The man's face grew serious.

"He has had many names," said he—"Monsieur, the brother of King Louis; Monsieur de Vermandois, his son; the Duke of Monmouth, son of your Charles II; the Count of Keroualze; Mattioli, secretary of the Duke of Mantua. There are even those who affirm that he was Louis XIV himself, and that Le Roi Soleil was an impostor."

"But that is impossible."

"Who knows?" answered the man. "Strange things happened in those days, especially in palaces."

It was a curious idea, and set one thinking. How if this man was really the heir to the crown, married to a daughter of one of his

jailers, as our guide suggested, and father of the little Buonaparte of whom we had already heard the story. Then Napoleon was no usurper, but the real heir to the throne of France!

"It would make a splendid historical play," said I, "only, unfortunately, it hasn't a happy ending." No, it had not a happy ending. The prisoner closed his days in the Bastille. He died almost suddenly, without having received the last Sacraments. Even after death he remained masked, and was borne to his grave, in the Church of Saint Paul, in a leaden coffin sealed with the royal seal, and buried under the name of Marchiergues.

The custodian took us to the pleasant little house which was, for some time, the prison of Marshal Bazaine, and from which he escaped down the rocks to his wife, who was waiting for him in a boat below.

But the hero of the island is the Masque de Fer. His story is so inscrutable, so full of romantic possibilities, that one could dream over it for ever.

We sailed back to Cannes with a good breeze, my husband steering. In the west the sun was sinking in Egyptian splendour, apricot and purple, with the mountains of Esterel lying flat against the sky, as though cut in black velvet. André Mouan sat smoking his pipe in blissful idleness, keeping a

watchful eye on the entrance to the harbour of Cannes, toward which we were steering. Then, somewhere out of the blue, came a song, a little song, and settled down beside me—

Around, the sea,  
Calm in its majesty ;  
On high the boundless sky,  
And in the midst are we.

A world of blue,  
Shot ever through and through  
With rays of golden haze ;  
And only I and you.

A setting sun,  
A journey almost done,  
Around no earthly sound,  
And you and I alone !

“ Attention à la jettée ! ” cried André, springing up and seizing one of the oars. But already we had rounded the corner and were in the smooth blue basin among the yachts and fishing boats.

“ Good-bye,” I said. “ I shall never forget the *Saint Paul* and Les Iles Lérins.”

“ You must go again,” said André, as he pocketed his ten francs and *pourboire*. “ It makes a pleasant excursion for a fine day, and the islands are not to be seen in a single visit ! ”



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